

# JORDAN'S TUNIS DIARY

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*by*

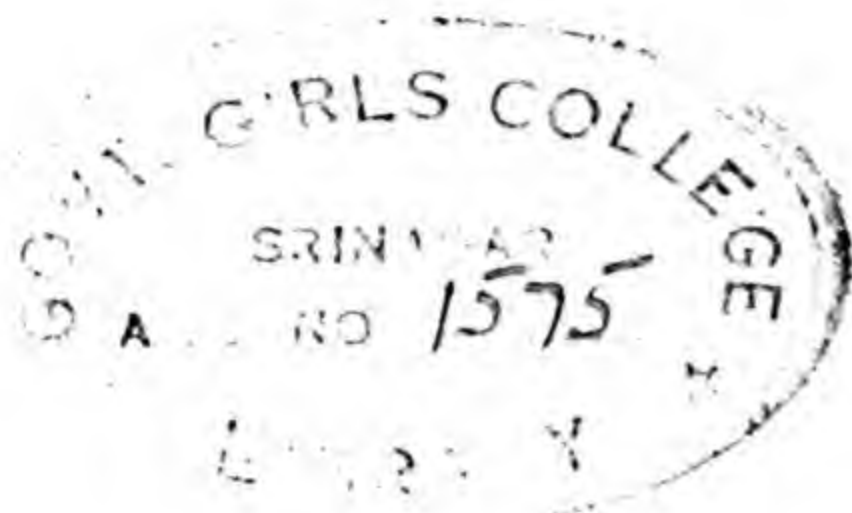
PHILIP JORDAN



COLLINS  
48 PALL MALL LONDON



This book is for officers and men  
of the 78th Division



### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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## FOREWORD

As AN experiment I kept a diary of the Tunisian campaign. It was an arduous task, but not, I feel on reading it, altogether worthless, for it recounts more faithfully than I could do in immediate retrospect that Great War in miniature. Some, but few of its hastily formed judgments, I cannot now entirely agree with, but I am still too close to the events with which this diary deals to be altogether certain that they were wrong. So I leave them ; and if, in the years to come, any one wants to throw them in my teeth, I shall have little or no defence. I have made few excisions, even in the knowledge that judgments formed at night on events that have hardly ceased may well be wrong before the dawn.

The campaign in Tunisia was an immense success for a paradoxical reason. By failing to gain our objective in early December we, in fact, ultimately gained a far greater prize. We had—thanks to the exceptional qualities of Eisenhower—created an allied staff who, in pain and sorrow, learned to work together as one unit. We forged from two raw forces, our own and the U.S. Army's 2nd Corps, two first-class fighting machines. We killed, wounded or captured approximately 200,000 finely trained Axis soldiers and airmen. Had Tunis fallen in December we should have been forced to learn at infinitely greater cost on the mainland of Europe the lessons that as hard a six months as this war has to show taught us.

We learned also—even if the Prime Minister and the State Department refuse to admit it—that “Gaullism” is a force that can now never be destroyed but which will, in fact, be the determining factor in French affairs. My own belief is that it is so strong that it will, if necessary, force the man whose name it bears to conform to its unspoken but perfectly clear demands. It is a healthy democratic force, and to those who have been forced to live under the German yoke it means no more than active resistance to the enemy. When Giraud drove into Tunis he had a rapturous welcome, not because he was the obscure Giraud, but because he was, to those who welcomed him, a “Gaullist.”



The nigger in the North African woodpile is Robert Murphy, who, because of his Vichy contacts failed completely to understand "Gaullism" and the extent to which it had seized people's imaginations. Those Frenchmen and women with whom he had daily official and social relations were the bitter enemies of the French patriotic movement and of French republican democracy; and his knowledge of the nature and extent of the movement was about nil. As well expect an Edwardian duchess to understand Fabianism. Had Murphy been correct in his judgment we might, in November, have sailed straight into Bizerta, despite its proximity to Axis airfields, and the campaign would have been over in a day. But then again, as I have shown, that would have been a pity, so that, ironically, we perhaps owe Murphy a lot. If we do it is a debt I should personally be glad to repudiate.

Our political record in North Africa was shameful and degrading. Pray heaven that we have learned from it; but it hardly seems so at this moment when even criticism of the Italian monarch is considered in poor taste. Not, I think, that it matters; for if the equivalent of Gaullism is to be found in other European countries, then the people will decide their own destiny whatever the Foreign Office and the State Department may decide. Reaction, which went grudgingly into this war, may soon wake up to the fact that it committed the profound error of freeing men from tyranny. And that, of course, will be the end of it. Not that I shall shed tears over the collective grave of British or any other kind of toryism that cares to topple in alongside it.

I ought to add that I had no opportunity of seeing this manuscript after the censors had finished with it, or of correcting and revising the proofs. I was on my way overseas again before the first of these grim tasks was completed.

PHILIP JORDAN.

*July 31.*

*June 21.*—Arrived in England to-day after being away just over 11 months. G.B. asked me to-night if I would cover the "Second Front," if and when, of course, for the *News Chronicle*. I agreed in principle, but said I wouldn't if it were opened in Dakar, and for two reasons. 1. I want no more of that sort of climate; and 2. my heart wouldn't be in it. If it is to be Dakar, it will be a compromise between giving way to popular clamour (how popular is it, I wonder, and do people not realise that we're fighting on six fronts already) and military wisdom, which would be disastrous.

However, I said, I'll go on "it" with pleasure (which is an easy word to use when the thing is obviously so far away still) if it's in Europe and out of a sense of duty if it's in Morocco or N. Africa.

*July 2.*—Lunched with General X. He says that our best tank men aren't in the Middle East because they're preparing something big and will "soon" be wanted here. I mistrust "soon." In this context I would not use "soon" unless I were speaking of some time less than 6 weeks. X wants me to go to America and tell them how good the army is in battle. I'd like to do that.

It is obvious to any one who's seen anything in this war that the British soldier is the equal of any other in the world, and better than most.

*July 25.*—Back to-night after week's tour of Ministry of Supply factories in the north. I found no enthusiasm whatever for lifting the ban on *The Daily Worker* or for "Second Front." As I'd thought: it's synthetic enthusiasm generated by the hard work and good tactics of the C.P.

I don't mean by this "lack of enthusiasm" for the "Second Front" that people are not tremendously anxious for it to open so that the war will the sooner be over. What I should have written is that there is a lack of enthusiasm for taking irresponsible action to bring pressure to bear on politicians to open the "Second Front."

I was deeply impressed by our war effort in the factories. I came to the conclusion that, considering our out-of-date industrial machine, we're just about working to human



capacity. Absenteeism isn't nearly as high as yapping Conservative M.P.s make out, nor are wages so high.

This lack of enthusiasm I noticed in factories doesn't mean that people don't want to do all possible to win the war : it means only that they're bored at the moment, as who wouldn't be, and those few who manage to maintain a permanent interest are bewildered.

The P.M. mustn't go about contradicting himself if he wants people to maintain their interest. His words are remembered longer than those of most people. But maybe he doesn't want interest and anxiety to remain incessant : perhaps he only wants to turn it on when it suits him, which is probably wise from his point of view.

He does himself a lot of harm by welcoming, at one moment, the offensive spirit shown by public clamour—however synthetic I may think it—for “it,” and deprecating it or allowing his ministers to do so the next.

Incidentally the communiqué issued after Molotov's visit about the “urgent task of creating a second front in Europe in 1942” either means that the decision has been made and agreed on or is the most fraudulent and dishonourable document in human history. I've noticed in the last few days that “government spokesmen” are trying to explain it away.

Dined to-night with a member of the War Cabinet who says the document commits us to nothing ; and that any way Molotov is satisfied. We shall see : I doubt it. I read the communiqué as a solemn commitment and so does every one with a grain of sense.

R. tells me that this week's report on home morale shows a fall in the public second front demand. His ministry is delighted. Hopes the fall will continue. I don't.

*July 31.*—Dined to-night with the enormously wealthy and aristocratic to find out what they think. Sherry, champagne, claret, brandy ! The privileged Russians don't do this : they have a job on hand.

I found no desire for a second front, and hatred for Russia mingled with grudging but none the less genuine admiration. If a second front were to fail they think they'd lose everything : if Russia is beaten without such a loss they think they'll be able to call the war off and keep something. How stupid they are : how gross.



I told my touchstone story of one of Beaverbrook's advance salesmen in Moscow, an Australian I was once forced to travel 6000 miles with ! In an attempt to "sell" Beaverbrook to Cripps he said : " Well, Lord Beaverbrook is a wonderful patriot : I believe he'd give half his fortune to win this war." Nobody could see anything remotely odd, let alone funny about this. They thought Lord B. wonderful, and could not understand that the story reflected in any way on the narrator and is probably a gross libel on Beaverbrook.

*August 10.*—I am 40 to-day. They'd better hurry up with the second front or I shall be too old to go on it.

*August 12.*—Saw Beaverbrook at dinner, very depressed, says Stalingrad bound to fall in the next few weeks and that therefore we must open second front in Europe without any further delay whatever. I said that although I was all for opening the second front I could not agree that Stalingrad would fall. I felt I had learned enough in Russia to enable me to say that with as much certainty as one can ever have in war and about any particular campaign. I said I was not going to be surprised if the Germans reached Stalingrad but that I would eat my now (I think) famous fur hat if they took it. I—with some vanity—reminded him that at the beginning of November, 1942, I had publicly made a similar offer about Moscow. (As I gave my fur hat to the chambermaid at Shepheards I might have some difficulty about getting it back.)

Beaverbrook not impressed, went to bed early and very gloomy.

*August 19.*—Lunched with Cripps who is as charming as ever, but seems to have lost his enthusiasm for the second front. I didn't like to remind him that only last December he told me that we ought by then to have started the second front. All I said was that although I was not prepared publicly to advocate the immediate opening of a second front I was beginning to think that if, by now, we were not ready to do the job then the government ought to get out. It was sheer lunacy to try to defend Malaya, particularly as no new dispositions had been made since the fall of France ; and as for supplies for Russia, unless we could send, as we could not, enough tanks of good quality to make a military difference we should only have sent them



provided that they were diplomatically useful—which patently they are not.

*August 25.*—Vincent Massey gave a lunch for the visiting Canadian editors. Three asked me: "When's the second front going to begin?"

*September 14.*—Am told that all press arrangements for covering the initial stages of the second front have been altered. N.P.A. been invited to choose two men to represent the whole British press. There was an N.P.A. meeting this morning and I was chosen as one of the two. A rather doubtful compliment! I have no exaggerated respect for the judgment of this particular committee; but it is a compliment from the world in which I have chosen to make my life. I wonder now how much of it there is left.

I must accept, of course. Went round to the M.O.I. to turn down most attractive offer I've had since the war began: flight to and from U.S.A. with about six weeks there, all found, as they say; and nothing to do except talk to my friends. As something like half the thirty people who really influence U.S. opinion are more or less friends of mine I could have done good. Particularly as I admire the British army more than I can say. I was desperately sorry to have to do what I did.

If we're to have the sort of post-war world Y wants I'm not sure that all the men who will die when the second front is opened should be asked to sacrifice themselves. It just isn't going to be worth it. Y, who wants to be P.M. after the war but won't admit to wanting to be more than Chancellor of the Exchequer or, if the worst comes to the worst, Director of Civil Aviation, says we must have "what will not be called fascism in this country." I tell him in that case let's call the war off right now. But he can't see that: he can't understand that one hates fascism equally whether it's German, Italian or British, and that decent men and women are not interested in destroying one brand of fascism in order to put a different brand in its place.

Y sees the world purely in terms of Anglo-American big business. He's not interested in anything else. What he contemptuously refers to as "the little countries" will have to do what they are told. I reminded him that we owed them something, that Norwegian tankers, for instance, had saved our lives in 1940 in almost as great degree as the



R.A.F. He was not impressed. He hates Russia. I think it a great pity he's in the Cabinet, despite his considerable charm.

He says we've already got three different designs on the drawing board for post-war air liners; and that we shall go into production with 1000 of each as soon as we win. Plans have been made to absorb 500,000 aircraft industry workers. He wants to get a start over France and Germany so that, by the time they're ready to compete it'll be too late.

The same lunatic policy, I fear, that led to this war. There's only one way to keep a good crazy big-business capitalist down and that's to cut his head off.

Talking of the second front I said that just after the fall of France one of our then military leaders had told me we should be able to lick the Germans in the spring of 1942. Which is why, maybe, he is now late but not lamented.

Met Gerald Templar in Dunhill's this morning. He's just become a major-general. Was a major when I last saw him. "Don't blow on my tabs," he said. "They're so bloody new they'll fall off." It's a pity there aren't more like him: he's 43 and tough. He thinks the sooner we have a second front the better. Says the men are getting over-bored. Who can blame them?

*September 28.*—There's too much loose talk about. I have now gathered (a) that I shall be off in rather less than a month. October 24 has been mentioned; (b) that my destination is probably Algiers; (c) that "for political reasons" Eisenhower will command; (d) that the War Office P.R. cars have already been shipped; (e) that the Russians will not approve the plan; (f) that the Americans will land first and the British afterwards; (g) that the French are expected to welcome the American flag whereas they would defend themselves against us; (h) that once on shore our forces will make for Tunis hell for leather; (i) that if the Americans are not welcomed we shall come home again; (j) that most of the leaking is being done by the ambassador of an allied power; (k) that the Americans will land at some place in North Africa different from ours and will then, as it were, open a door for us at, as I say Algiers.

Someone else is leaking too, for several people who have



no connection with the ambassador mentioned know what's going on.

Either there is much too much loose talk or this is a deliberate deception beautifully done. I fear it's the former. Three men in my office know what I do, but one thinks it'll begin in 10 days. I don't. What inclines me to suspect the worst is all the activity reported from Gibraltar. It's on too big a scale for deception, I think.

October 5.—I told V. to-day that there's too much talk and a little of what I know. That'll come back to me.

My book *Russian Glory* published to-day. All it does to me is remind me of my moral cowardice. Why did I cut out of the proofs last August my certainty (and reasons for it) that Japan will not attack Russia? That's as bad as being wrong. Otherwise I don't think there's much to be ashamed of.

October 6.—At V.'s request I went to Combined Operations to-day to see C.M. who is Intelligence Officer. He'd heard what I said to V. and would I tell him what I knew. I did. But when you've formed some sort of picture in your mind it's very hard to remember what you've been told and what you conjecture or deduce from "facts." The home of Combined Operations is enough to make you tough. No lift. I walked up four long flights of stairs, much more slowly than the marine who guided me!

Had a medical at the W.O. and was passed fit for "strenuous exercise."

October 7.—Lunch with Rothermere. He knows what I know. Is it a deception or not? It's quite impossible to know how far this loose talk goes. Naturally there's some in Fleet Street, because it's shop. I asked the W.O. if I should get my kit ready. They said "yes." I must make my own deductions from this and cannot but remember "October 24" although for the life of me I can't recall who told it to me.

A.B. of the U.S. Political Warfare department dined with me. He says Eisenhower is very worried about leakages and attributes it to one of our cabinet ministers.

C.M. called up again and asked me to go round to see him to-morrow.

October 8.—C.M. had a M.I.S. man there. Fat, gay but obviously no fool at all. I repeated my story behind locked

doors ! But there's nothing I can do. I wish there was. They'll report what I say to the F.O. and leave it at that. They promised not to bring my name into it in any circumstances.

October 9.—Saw Duff Cooper at Victoria. He said : " I hear you've been reporting loose talk." So much for Combined Ops'. promise. L. at the W.O. says " you'll probably be warned about going before you're a week older." He gave me a list of kit to get, over the telephone. Is this quite wise or am I getting too security minded ?

Bought a haversack and a bottle of cascara tablets, which is an odd beginning to a kit collection. I've got most of it already.

The office say they'll give my wife £5000 if I'm killed. I forgot to ask if the income tax will take half that. I suppose, technically, it would be a windfall !

I see Lord Beaverbrook has changed his mind (see entry for August 12). The *Express* says this morning " Stalingrad will stand." What ho !

October 12.—Reading over to-night what I wrote on September 28 I am inclined to think that I'm right about N. Africa, otherwise why didn't Alexander attack last full moon, and why, when as much is in his favour at the moment as it's ever likely to be with the present African set-up, is he fooling around ? It's not like Alexander to miss even a fraction of an opportunity.

And if it should turn out to be N. Africa what a tremendous opportunity for enlisting powerful forces on our side we have missed. Soon after the fall of France, when I foresaw the necessity for this N. African campaign I wrote an article on the necessity for enlisting the Arabs on our side. It was published in the *News Chronicle* in October, 1940. Here for the sake of what permanence war-time paper can give it, is the article :

" In the main hall of the French Residency in Rabat there is what must be one of the largest plate-glass windows in the world.

" If you stand behind it and look out upon Morocco you can see the little white town of Rabat at your feet ; and beyond its plaster battlements the rich fields from which a nobler France annually drew fantastic tribute. Beyond the



fields, far south, are the Atlas Mountains, like dust clouds in the tremendous sky.

"Only a few years ago I looked out of this window. My host, General Nogues, the living symbol of Imperial France and master of the Sultan, was at my side. There was a sirocco blowing across the fields through whose roan earth showed the first delicate blades of summer wheat. General Nogues said, 'Already this morning the wind has done more than 10,000,000 francs' worth of damage to the crops.' I said, 'That is more than Abd-el-Krim did to Morocco in all his life. But not even a general can send the sirocco to Réunion.'

"That remark then was perhaps more impertinent than pertinent. But it is pertinent now ; and is worth recalling because the circumstances of history have greatly lessened the power and the importance of General Nogues ; and they could give, if we allowed them to, great power and great importance to Abd-el-Krim.

"So long as we fail to exploit the situation that now exists in Morocco, we postpone the date of our victory over our enemies. I have never thought and I still do not think that the African battlefield will become really important until the last stages of this war. But that we can eventually turn it into the graveyard of Hitler and Mussolini is a certainty.

"All the more reason, therefore, why we should now prepare the strategy we propose to adopt when the springs of our offensive have been fully compressed. There is no sign that we are doing so.

"Our treatment of this war has, so far, been piecemeal. Whenever an emergency has arisen, whenever, obviously any one has had a 'bright idea,' the government has created an *ad hoc* organisation to deal with it.

"And as a rule the results have been disastrous. They will continue to be disastrous until the government has a policy instead of a series of disjointed ideas. To take but one example : Dakar. The expedition was conceived in a vacuum, and, let us face it, even if it had been a success might easily have become more of a liability than an asset ; for the object of the expedition was to get in touch with its French colonisers, not to appeal to the imagination of its autochthonous population.

"That is an important point. If we wish to enlist the



goodwill of those who dwell in the French Empire or in the empires of either our open or our partially disguised enemies, we must get into sympathetic touch not with the European colonisers, but with the indigenous populations. The paramount importance of this cannot be overstressed.

"It will be a measure not only of our military wisdom, but of our political sincerity as well.

"If we are more concerned to prevent the complete liberation of any one section of the African peoples than we are to win the war quickly—on the assumption, presumably, that to assist in any such liberation of one territory would put ideas into the heads of all the others—then there is not much point in fighting this war at all, and we might as well call it off here and now. But if we are truly concerned with the freedom of peoples the world over, then we already have in Morocco a potential army of incalculable power which will fight its battle on our side because our cause will be its own.

"If it be objected that General de Gaulle is our ally and that he is concerned to restore to France the position she formerly occupied; and that he is concerned with nothing else, then we must repudiate General de Gaulle with the same cynical rapidity that his country repudiated us. We cannot risk the cause of liberty for a handful of men.

"And if we neglect to mobilise that potential army in Morocco because we are afraid of what such a mobilisation would imply, then we shall have only ourselves to blame if our enemies convince the world—and the Arab world in particular—that we are more concerned to maintain our empire—even perhaps to add to it—than we are for all those abstract splendours for which we say we are fighting.

"If we wish it we can still make the Arab world what it is by no means at present—our ally. It is not too late.

"We can live down our betrayal of the Arab cause at the end of the last war: we can undo in half a dozen weeks all the harm that the German and Italian propaganda machines have done throughout the Arab world in the last half-dozen years. We can produce that ounce of example that is worth a ton of propaganda.

"How can we do it?

"How can we start a new Arab revolt whose results will be incalculably greater than any that Lawrence could possibly have achieved.



"A leader is ready and waiting. I have travelled from end to end of Morocco by all kinds of roads and tracks ; and I know that that leader would be welcomed.

"His name is Abd-el-Krim. At present he is the prisoner of the conquered French on the little island of Réunion, that lies west of Madagascar. His rescue would be worth the loss of a capital ship and ten battalions of gallant men ; for his name is still a magic name in the kasbahs and the souks of all Morocco.

"The flame of revolt has never gone out in that country. 'If I had to march on Spanish Morocco,' General Nogues told me in 1937, 'I could have it alight with revolt in 48 hours. Every corner of it.' General Richert of the Foreign Legion told me, 'We have never really pacified (French) Morocco. I don't suppose we ever shall.'

"All that was said in the days when France had prestige ; and when, too, she had no knowledge of the meaning of the words, 'inferiority complex.' Yes, and in the days when she was still the unchallenged military power of the world.

"Let us, then, admitting that Gibraltar is no longer a synonym for safety, look ahead, and prepare the path by which we can nourish our armies in Africa, and—equally important—force our enemies to fight on two fronts there.

"Let us create the new Arab rising, the new Revolt in the Desert ; and when we have done so do not let us consider it merely as a colonial adjunct to our might.

"Let us return Abd-el-Krim, who never fought for anything but his freedom to the wide and barren mountains where he can draw breath, and to the splendid fertility of his valleys, whose riches Europe must learn to do without, unless it buys them in the open market. Let us arm him to the teeth. But before we do that let us make explicit and uncontradictable promises to him and to his people. Let us swear that we have no designs upon Morocco and that, so long as we are able, we shall forbid any power from again subjecting him and his people to colonial exploitation.

"Then, and not until then, we shall have added to our war potential tremendous forces who will fight because they will have something to fight for. We shall have set the Arab world ablaze with crusading fervour from one end of its gigantic territories to the other.

"We delude ourselves when we pretend that the Arab

prefers to live under British tutelage rather than any other. A dungeon is a dungeon whether it be on a mountain-top or down a coal-mine. The Arab relishes freedom more even than we do ; and history has once more tossed us the chance to make that freedom real.

"Upon the morning we take the first step towards creating it we shall be better men ; for it is hypocritical nonsense to pretend that we are more civilised than the Arabs. Electric light and running h. and c. do not constitute civilisation. Particularly when we instal them only to blow them to pieces every quarter of a century."

I withdraw no word of it ; and it explains itself. Why in God's name don't we suit our actions to our propaganda. If the Atlantic Charter means anything at all it must apply to Arabs as well as Norwegians. And Indians.

I remember Nogues as a staunch adherent (in private) of Republican Spain during the civil war, not entirely I felt because of the threat to French security which Franco's victory would mean, or because of Blum's policy, but because he is a humane gentleman. He is first and foremost a soldier, so he would undoubtedly find it difficult to come over on to our side in the event of an invasion ; but I think there's a 50-50 chance. His wife was very anglophile : she asked me to recommend a school in England for her son, as both he and she were anxious the boy should begin his education in this country. A good sign ? Maybe, and I think just this side of probably. I liked Nogues. He gave me a lot of valuable information about the German guns in Spanish Morocco at that time. All of it correct.

N.'s chef du Deuxième Bureau, Commandant Bertrand (who'd been in Tehran and claimed friendship with Harold Nicolson), I should certainly not trust, but maybe he's no longer there. I could smell the Vicar of Bray's corpse when I went into his room.

If he's still in Tunisia (I last heard of him in Bizerta : he was there in 1940) we shall come up against General Richert, a cousin of, of all people, Tabouis. He commanded the Foreign Legion when I stayed with him at Fez in '37. I should say he was an Herriot man in politics, in which he took much interest and about which he was far better informed than his cousin ! A real Anglophile then, but what



is he now? For all Frenchmen these last two years have been a death and a resurrection in hell where all things are seen in a distorting mirror, which lots of them don't know distorts at all. And it is harder for a soldier than for others: he has an oath, and his training is supposed to have kicked all politics out of him by the time he has first heard what the word might conceivably mean. Perhaps that's why the Free French are so unpopular with our officer class in the Middle East, and, I think, with the regular other ranks.

October 13.—Reading Tolstoy's *The Raiders* this morning I came across this: "War—what an incomprehensible phenomenon. When one's reason asks: 'Is it just, is it necessary?' an immediate voice always replies, 'No! Only the persistence of the unnatural occurrence makes it seem natural and a feeling of self-preservation makes it seem just.'"

October 16.—Well, now I know. The Americans will land—or try to—at Casablanca and (probably) Oran. The concentrations we hear about on the Gambia border are a blind to screen the main show and will only be used as number one offensive if the others fail. In other words Dakar, if they go for it, will be a side show of its own. If it fell we should, of course, have all the territory in our hands, which would make a tremendous difference in our favour in the proposed main operations. Four British divisions (purely British) will land at Algiers and go hell for leather towards Tunis. (They better be quick or how will they manage about supplies, because unless miracles happen and the French welcome us, the first possibility of supplies by the navy is Tripoli.) Anderson (I've never heard of him: is it a *nom de guerre*?) is to command the British forces which will be called "an army." (This does not and will not redeem the promise in the June communiqué after Molotov's visit, but in my opinion it is the quickest way of winning the war.) We're due to leave on October 24. I may be sent with the second lot, leaving later. It's one hell of a gamble, and much is to depend (as I wrote on Sept. 28) on the sort of reception we get. By "we," I mean the Americans primarily. In spite of my hopes I fear deeply. The French are the most humiliated people in the world, and because they must still be conscious that they are the light of the world and its greatest people, I feel sure they will fight, if



only to try to regain some vestiges of self-respect and to justify themselves to their own bad consciences. Battle will be a self-administered penance and a purging such as only fire can give.

God help us all when we start fighting Frenchmen, however, inevitable if we are to conquer their enemy and ours. It's like chucking stones at the only light we can see by.

German propaganda attempts to convince us they are expecting an attack on Normandy seem to me to be extraordinarily clumsy. They must know what we're up to, although obviously they don't know exactly where.

Rang the War Office this evening and told them that if they had anything to say to me next week I should be at home. "All the week?" E. J. asked rather pointedly, with emphasis on the "all." Maybe I'm reading too much into the slightest and most ordinary events, but you get like that when you're waiting—as I am now—with your bags locked and everything ready.

October 20.—I see Darlan has arrived in Algiers: I hope he's still there when we arrive.

I wish I didn't have such doubts (if that isn't too mild a word) about our political conduct of the war. *Pravda's* reiterated demand for the trial of Hess only underlines once more the necessity that we should make absolutely clear what we are fighting this war for, then, with an absolutely clear conscience we could state our valid reasons for not trying him; and get away with it.

In a few weeks' time hundreds, maybe thousands, of British lads will be killed. It is not good enough that they should be killed merely to defeat Germany: it is good enough that they should be killed, if, by their deaths, everything that Germany stands for should be destroyed, no matter where it dwells. Fascism in Britain is as rotten as Fascism in Germany. But the powers-that-be don't agree, even though they tell us that this is a war to destroy Nazism.

If the second front is to be opened to make the world safe for high-born traitors, better not open it at all, but call it a day.

10.30 p.m.—Evelyn Montague just telephoned to say that he's had his official notification to leave in three days, and that I'll get mine in a couple of days. He is the corres-



pondent to go with me. As he was the reserve choice and I was one of the original two (Alan Moorehead of the *Express* was the other, but he's still in the U.S.) I think I ought to be the first to go, as I would wish to. I shall go to London to-morrow and look into this.

*October 21.*—Was officially informed this afternoon that it is time to be ready. I have to report with all my baggage to-morrow, so that it may be marked.

Dined—immoderately well—with Duff Cooper at Whites. Turtle soup, partridges ("one man, one bird" D. said,) welsh rabbit. And hock, "the only good thing to come out of Germany," to which I added, "except dead persons." D. asked me if what's about to happen "is common knowledge in Fleet Street," and I was with absolute truth able to say "no." I instanced, without mentioning his name, Ronald Walker, who is usually better informed than most people, who yesterday offered to bet me that nothing'll happen before Christmas. No : there's no talk at all on the matter in Fleet Street. Which is surprising.

Two officers—one a major, one a captain—were cashiered last week and given, respectively, two years and one year of hard labour for loose talk. The P.M. won't let any publicity be given to the two sentences, which is stupid of him. Publicity would do any amount of good and would shut other mouths.

Eden to-day assured Tom Driberg in the House that Hess is being treated as a prisoner and enjoys the same discomforts as others. At drinks before dinner an F.O. man actually praised Hess to me. No speculation, blameless private life and all that. Didn't actually do any persecuting himself. It makes me sick.

Am told that "painful surprise" was shown by the Admiralty that the French admiral didn't turn up at the Trafalgar day ceremonies ! They couldn't understand why he should have had pressing business elsewhere.

*October 22.*—Called to W.O. conference in Cadogan Gardens where Mac made a little speech to the P.R. officers who are coming with us to what he kept calling "Brazil" or "the Aleutians." Told them they were our servants. It's obvious they're all determined to do their very best for us. And that'll be good. He didn't say so but I gather Mac (Lt.-Col. in charge of P.R. in the field) is flying to Gibraltar



to-morrow. E. M. goes to-morrow ; and I expect to go Sunday.

Commander of the British force is Lieut.-General Kenneth Arthur Noel Anderson, C.B. and M.C., who used to be in the Seaforths. He was born on Christmas Day, 1891. So the name I noted on October 16 is right after all.

All our copy will—as at present intended—be flown to England, which means delays. Doubtless we shall capture a cable or wireless station eventually and things will be speeded up. We're going to suffer from lack of transport, but I don't think that'll worry us : it's never worried me : I've always found the army only too willing to help whenever they can.

If we advance fast an aeroplane will carry our stuff back to base. There'll be field censors with us, but stuff, alas, will have to go through American censorship before coming home. That'll waste time. And—which horrifies me, there is to be political censorship as well. I resent that : it is an impertinence, but I shall make an arrangement with the office by which I shall be able to inform them if it makes warped reading. Officially we still know nothing beyond the fact that we're off somewhere.

Ed Murrow sent my accreditation from Columbia Broadcasting to-day, but as there are to be no recording vans I don't think I'll be much use to him.

I have no fears any more for the success of the enterprise. How long will it last ? With luck we'll be in Tunis by Christmas. By which time the Russians will be knocking the bejesus out of the Germans.

*October 24.*—B.B.C. announce to-night that the 8th Army has attacked. Pray God they are not too early. How wonderful it is here to-day : from the hill Petworth looked like a Canaletto this afternoon : a sky washed clean, immense clarity and clouds rinsed in spring water. How happy I am that the telephone has kept silent all day, except for a wrong number at 8 this morning. But to-morrow, what then ?

*October 25.*—Will I report for orders on Tuesday morning. So says the W.O. by telephone to-day. According to the *Sunday Express* it was not until June, 1940, that the W.O. decided to have paratroops and airborne troops ! And the punishment for such neglect is being made a Field-Marshal or at any rate being given a position of trust.



*October 27.*—We're called for 4 o'clock on Thursday morning : the rendezvous is in Chelsea at 11 p.m. to-morrow: Thereafter no communications with any one. We don't know where we're going, but my guess is north, for we have to take two meals with us. Where we're going to carry everything God knows. To read I am taking *Madame Bovary*, *The Golden Treasury*, *Herodotus* in the Everyman 2 volumes edition, Tolstoy's *Tales of Army Life*, the Sonnets and all Housman's poems. Also *Hamlet* and Herbert Read's excellent anthology for soldiers, *The Knapsack*, with a rather cissy binding that is supposed to be waterproof. I bought a bottle of whisky from Berry this morning. I don't drink it, but it is the world's best bribe ! I would give a lot to be going home, but the nearer we come to this the more I find myself excited and pleased. This can be a great victory. It looks as though the French still think we're going to strike at Dakar, although they're obviously—and naturally—nervous about the whole of N. Africa.

*October 29.*—4.30 a.m. Well, here we are, sitting in an old-fashioned third-class carriage in Addison Road Station, waiting to go where ? I haven't even now the faintest idea. The whole thing seems quite unreal, and like a schoolboy's treat ; it's just as uncomfortable. Tea at 1d. at a canteen, and someone handing round grapes from Fortnums. As usual when army movements take place the whole proceedings are like something out of *Alice in Wonderland* : young Guards officers with a pull somewhere misarranging the platforms, and being put right by a sergeant.

4.45. We're off, three-quarters of an hour late, which isn't bad. My companions are quiet, which is what I like, and seem to have charm. When shall we be back ?

Soon after dawn I recognised the outskirts of Stafford, so knew we were going north, but, after eating four sardine sandwiches, slept again until the train stopped and we were ordered out. Well, my first guess is wrong. Of all places in the world : Of all towns in the world from which to start a desperate enterprise that may save the world, it is the least appropriate. There's more than a touch of what Wigan stands for about it : comedians, kippers and for some quite irrelevant reason, Vesta Tilley. If I were not so tired I should still be laughing.

I carry a pack which has already bruised my shoulders



beyond endurance, two haversacks, a water-bottle, a tin hat with a fishing net on it and a gas mask. It's the sort of thing that makes you regret always having hired a porter for the least thing.

We walked through mean, bomb-shattered streets filled with cheerful, kindly people, sprinkled here and there with what, when I was a child, you never saw, but which is becoming a sign that you're in provincial England: hard-faced, middle-aged platinum blondes in trousers. The height of unaestheticism. Smart R.T.O. here. He had a dozen trams waiting for us in which we all rode to the docks. If only they'd commemorated him by deeds instead of docks I would not now be sitting in *The Duchess of Richmond*, waiting to see men kill each other because such is their abhorrent duty.

Officers and N.C.O.s mess in the same dining-room, but there's a wooden screen down the middle, so that sergeants can be heard and not seen. I've seen three men with monocles on board so far.

At the last minute yesterday added Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man* to my books, (a) to balance prose better with poetry, and (b) because I now never travel without it. What a tremendous book; sublime in places, and still true. Modern research has trifled with it here and there, but has left it virtually untouched, a monolith. And still as readable as when Sherlock Holmes commended it to Watson. It's strange to think that it once gave serious offence to decent people; I suppose it is one of the books that greatly changed men's minds in the late nineteenth century. It must have once changed H.G.'s and he's changed many since then (1872 the book was published). The last part suffers from Reade's necessary lack of knowledge more than the others. His explanation of the rise of monotheism is plausible and noble, but had he known about Akhenaton his conclusions would have been interestingly different, even if his conceptions of morality no less sublime. He also, as was natural, misinterpreted the Commune and what it was after: he speaks as though equalitarianism was the desire of good socialists, and so is naturally scathing. Had he written ten years later he would have been less scorched by the evil fires of misrepresentation.

I wonder what he'd have made of the endocrine glands,



in terms of which I've always wanted to write a history of the world.

The reviews of *Russian Glory* have given me much pleasure. They are all good, some quite unnecessarily so, except, of course, the *Daily Worker*.

Lunch on board bad, but unlimited butter ! Dinner hardly better. I elected to feed in the second service : breakfast 8.30 (reveille is at 6, and I hate getting up before 10), lunch 1.30 and dinner at 7. By this choice I have forfeited all hope of a seat in the lounge after meals, but it's worth it. Last inspection is at 10.30 to-morrow so I suppose we'll move off on the afternoon tide. This is a dry ship : no beer even during the voyage. That doesn't worry me.

Told to-night that the reason why correspondents have not yet been issued with our new book of regulations for conduct in the field is because the W.O. printed on them "Secret : not to be communicated to the Press" ! How typical. All have been withdrawn for reprinting which is gross waste of paper to save someone's face.

The ship is overcrowded. Only 75 per cent of the men have hammocks, the others have to sleep beneath them, which means last to bed and first up in the morning. And already there's been duplication of space allotment, which is inexcusable. I watched two officers, two sergeants allotting space this morning—I'm told they had the whole scheme worked out ten days ago—and there is no reason for this carelessness, unless they got over-tired filling in the allotment papers of each small unit six times ! And no carbon paper.

As usual the R.C. padre is a jump ahead : notices for mass each morning and confession each evening were up early this evening. The C. of E. padres have shown no signs of life yet. I resent this, although I am not a churchgoer (I haven't been in one except for architectural interest for a quarter of a century almost) because, I suppose, of some inherited anti-popery, and of my conviction that there is little to choose between fascism and the Church of Rome as types of social organism to avoid like the plague.

October 30.—Still there. We moved out into the roads at 2 p.m. and look like staying there until to-morrow. To-day's rumours are that as our fresh water is down to 2 gallons a day we shall be at sea a month, which is rubbish. The cut



is because of the sudden increase in the number of what the army will call "bodies." The other is that we're moving up north. I hope to God not: we shall miss the initial stages as it is. Rumour number 2 is what has been leaked to the troops: first stop Cape Town. Oh, and a third rumour: that we're to sail under the American flag.

We have to surrender all sterling and in exchange shall be given—what? Bank of Algeria and Morocco notes. I hope not: they're uglier than pounds.

Food is better. Bacon and eggs for breakfast. I am delighted the ship is dry, for this is the sort of atmosphere in which one is easily seduced into drinking too much. Smoked one of my few precious Havanas after lunch.

We have three padres on board. C. of E., Free Church and R.C., and there is to be a Jewish service on Saturday.

If, as seems likely, we are to travel to our destination in this 20,000 tons ship (or thereabouts) we can't be expecting anything in the way of rough stuff. To land needs a full-sized friendly, or, at least, non-hostile harbour. And most of the officers are going to staff appointments. There are too many old brigadiers on board for us to run our heads into trouble. I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry. I have no hankering after military glory, but if there is to be trouble I ought to be there. That's what I'm paid for, and what ought to be recorded. But maybe we'll get enough trouble before we're through. And to see Rommel squeezed to pieces will be something to have lived for.

All the same this is not fulfilling "the urgent task of creating a second front in Europe in 1942" unless we're mighty quick. Soon the Russians will be striking back with a power that is going to surprise those gentry who are always surprised by anything the Russians do, and we must not delay.

I re-read Smuts's speech to the two Houses to-day; and what the fuss is all about I still can't see. Neither common politeness nor the dicky S. African political situation can possibly justify the eulogies.

October 31.—There are several thousand men on board, exclusive of the ship's company (R.N. 5 officers, 17 men). There are 32 lifeboats and about 300 rafts. First officer explained this morning the "abandon ship" routine. Like most sailors, lucid, short, exact and simple. I wish I could



write that way. He only made one mistake. He said "refrain from doing" when he meant "don't."

Away in convoy at 2.15 and—until dark at any rate—steering N.W., so my initial guess may not have been so wrong after all. Some officers will go to any length to try and discover where we're going; and there seems to be an expanding idea that the correspondents know. (I am the only one who's played his hunch and bought maps of Algeria and Tunisia.) I was reading *Bovary* this evening when a young major came up and said that as we might be going to a land where men speak French, would I so converse with him as he was "rusty." I declined.

The brigadiers in the pansy battle-dresses find the officers' lounge too noisy, so they've been given a roped-off part at the head of the main stairs on A deck. They look like a well-dusted exhibit at Mme. Tussaud's.

We are no longer allowed to undress at night or to move around without lifebelts. Very uncomfortable.

The men are packed in a way that would make sardines congratulate themselves, but they seem happy. They have better rations than on shore, but complain of the 14 hours' interval between tea and breakfast. They had a good breakfast this morning (eggs to one mess each day), minestrone, roast beef and two vegetables and sweet for dinner, fried fish for tea. W.O.s have the same dinner as we do, without savoury and the sergeants, soup, meat, etc. and cheese. Most men I've talked with to-day say the cooking is better than they're used to. One or two cases of chronic home-sickness. Tears and vomiting, but they'll be all right. It's very calm.

Vichy says a large convoy has arrived at Gibraltar. Troopships, a battleship, tankers and so on.

No sign of Old Glory at the mizzen yet. The Americans on board are good boys. One asked to-day for publicity so that his folks back home would know where he was!

*November 1.*—Through the boom before breakfast and now anchored about half a mile inside. As the mist rose you could see ever more and more great ships stretching away in the distance; and in the farthest distance the blurred, almost transparent silhouette of a new aircraft carrier. The basin is full. Ship jammed to ship so that those nearest abeam seem to sprout funnels from all over their upper-



works. Latest arrival smothered with the wine-coloured berets of the airborne troops. Ships crowded with Americans have gone on to berths up the river. The troops cheered them when they spotted a nurse on the boatdeck. We are a ship without women.

As the morning moved towards noon the horizon widened, and two heavy and one light cruiser were disclosed by the sun, which uncovers all things. A Norwegian destroyer and a British submarine have gone out : there are Catalinas and Sunderlands above us ; and in the sky a few pointed balloons with triple fins like knives. There is no wind : the smoke from stacks and from the little store houses on shore wanders at no bidding but its own. There is snow on the hills, the first I have seen since I left Tehran in February. The day is warm.

This is my third war-time visit to the port and is filled with memories. From here I took off in a Catalina bound for Archangel, sixteen months ago. A year earlier I arrived here by sea from Cape Town, having hurried from Cairo in 23 days lest there should be invasion. In those days it was still too early for Churchill to speak of us as "compressing the springs of our offensive." We struggled then for breath ; but to-day the springs are compressed ; and soon now will be released.

Yet, outwardly, there is no change : the land looks as though it had never heard of war, and even here there is something of the air of peace-time cruising. Except that the ships are grey and their decks lined with men in khaki.

I have been asked to lecture to the officers on Russia and Burma.

Night came with beauty ; and at twilight's end the sky in the west, where the hills have fallen below the sea, was like a raked-out fire, confused dark smoke against the crimson infinity. The hill tops were sliced into a saffron belt of sky. It changed rapidly into an electric blue that was palled with fluffy black, which in turn, as you looked east up the river, became solid. Only the riding lights of fifteen great transports showed : the moon was down ; and there were shadows moving on the face of the waters that were warships. This was serenity.

We crossed the boom about 9.30 and are at sea, but



there is no movement. Is there a war on? I can, at this moment, only think of the golfers I watched through my glasses this afternoon; and the gay dresses on the sea front and the grass on the hillsides shining in the warm sun of this day. We should be glad of rough weather, I dare say: it is safer that way.

Oranges for dessert to-night. But you can't buy a cigar until we're outside the three-miles limit. If the Germans tried to invade, the customs men wouldn't let them in until they'd paid duty on their equipment. I miss the papers.

*November 2.*—Land still in sight all morning but we left it this afternoon, steering W.N.W. Clocks back (or as the army says "retarded") 60 minutes to-night. Probably sailing due west now (10 p.m.) as we've just turned several degrees to port. If, as I believe, the opening of the operation is scheduled for November 4, I suppose we'll get there about November 9. Still in the dark, officially, but it seems we may be told to-morrow. The captain has a number of sealed orders which he opens at stated times, and as soon as he knows, we are to know.

The convoy is a majestic sight this warm, calm day, with visibility about as far as ever possible. A number of liners, 2 small freighters and our escorts of destroyers and smaller vessels. There was some disappointment this morning when it was seen that we have no carrier and no large warships. Perhaps they'll come later. Saw two Spitfires soon after dawn but nothing since.

There are P. & O.s, B.I.s, C.P.s, Cunarders and three elegant American liners, with wide, squat funnels. There is something as inexorable as the spinning of the globe about our progress across these still waters. Gravity pulls us: we are not impelled by engines. Such it seems. The sky is clear and there are great stars.

Between the two main R.A.S.C. bases (there are to be two sub-bases as well) in the initial stages, there will be 364 miles, and communications will be maintained by sea. This looks (if it's true) as though we shall have a simultaneous smack at Bizerta.

All this gossip is irresistible: there is nothing else, and it matters to us all. I hope all is well at home. The B.B.C. news is bad (not in content: that is good; but in selection) and reception worse.



If action stations are given I have permission to go on the bridge. I hope we shall never need them.

I took another look at the convoy after dark. All is so calm that it is as if we were still and that the waters moved past us on a permanent tide. We cannot be far short of 300,000 tons.

*November 3.*—I should not like to have Baldwin's conscience—if he's got one, or, if they have, those of the men and women who supported him. Here are several thousand men compelled by ghastly necessity to redeem Baldwin's crime by the shabbiest, most futile method of argument known to men—war. Some of these men might have enriched or ennobled their fellows; and they will die. Some are fit to do nothing else; but the guilty are not here, unless we are all guilty, which is manifestly not true. People no longer get the government they deserve: they get the government which they are told to vote for, or which, when it no longer represents them, artificially prolongs its life. So that men—who have short memories—could properly judge their rulers, we should have elections in times of adversity and not of triumph. An election three months ago would have kicked the Conservatives out: when victory comes they will ride the wave because they will be able to say: "look: we are still the majority and the war is won, therefore we have won the war," and because men will not and are not taught to think, they will accept. And we shall be off again, preparing for, or rather sowing the seeds of, the third Punic War, in which we shall play the part of Carthage.

Just read Masefield's excellent idea for a war memorial. Statue of a politician with these lines beneath it: "What with my folly and my lies My country's youth in glory dies."

Finished an article for *The Strand* on "If I Could Go Back." Chose Tangier, but I can think of other places. Alfambra in the mountains of Aragon, Toulouse, Wadi Rumm in the N.E. corner of the Red Sea, the road between Tiberius and Mt. Hebron, Tehran, Polygandros (although I've only see it from the air), Rabat, and, of course, New York. In all these there is that rare link between the spirit and the body, so that you are never tired, because each sustains and nourishes the other. All very nostalgic, but I felt that way so, maybe, it's a good article.



Although this is a dry ship, on Eisenhower's orders it turns out, you wouldn't think so this evening. Men are reeling down the passages. The sea is getting up.

*November 4.*—Ship's rumours are quite unaccountable, and how they begin will always remain a mystery. The troops are quite convinced—and nothing will unconvince them—that Sweden has declared war on Germany and Spain on the United Nations.

This convoy is a daily miracle. Hour after hour, light and dark, the ships maintain their place. At night those which are only a couple of hundred yards or so away on either beam, are quite invisible. And yet, as dawn breaks, there they still are. All of them, exactly as they were when night fell fourteen hours earlier.

Claudius, in *Hamlet* which I was reading to-day, has this to say of democracy: "... the distracted multitude, who like not in their judgment, but their eyes." Alas, how true, and the cure for that is not to abandon democracy, but to educate children properly: make them citizens not servants. The only way to do that is to offer good rewards to teachers, so as to get first-class brains.

While we were playing that exceedingly dull game Housey Housey to-night, which is the only gambling permitted in the ship, the great news came through, that the Afrika Korps is in full retreat. With us closing in on the rear the job should soon be done once and for all. And then to Europe through its soft blister.

The ship's run in the last twenty-five hours was pretty good for a convoy. The two freighters must be at full stretch.

*November 5.*—Horizon narrowed to-day by rain. Horrified to hear the king had sent Alexander a message of congratulations. These cables, like days of prayer, too often herald disasters. But the news is glorious.

The ship's doctor tells me that British ports are staffed, in the lower grades, by corrupt men. He says that whenever his crew go ashore the dock police mulct them of 2s. 6d. each; and that if they don't pay at the end of each voyage they search them whenever they go ashore, and in all kinds of other ways are able to make their lives miserable. About 250 men of this ship alone pay 2s. 6d. to be divided among not more than three men. He says the



racket doesn't stop there. Taxi-drivers are kept off the dock if they consistently fail to educate their passengers to pay the same ransom.

This is written in the officers' lounge. Around me men are playing chess, bridge, solo and one is playing the piano. War is mentally remote ; and it is quite impossible to realise that any moment we may be at action stations or even in the sea. Everything is unreal. We eat on peace-time standards, have a library, organised entertainments ; and, as few have the vaguest idea where they're going, the whole thing's like a kind of secret pleasure cruise which nobody asked for. But in a seldom-uttered way the officers feel they are at last going to do something worth-while ; and they are glad men.

*November 6.*—The curtain was officially raised at 9.30 this morning by the senior brigadier (R. A. B. Mosley, who tells me with some shame that he is a cousin of Oswald, "but distant, thank God").

At dawn on Sunday the operation opens. There will be three simultaneous assaults : on Casablanca (where the opposition is expected to be heavy and bitter), on Oran and on Algiers (where it is expected the opposition will be lighter). The first two will be purely American enterprises, the one on Algiers will be conducted by the 34th U.S. division supported by troops of the 78th British division and commando troops.

Roughly speaking (which is all I can do at the moment) the British Army will advance east from Algiers with the object of taking Tunis : the Americans will occupy Oran and Morocco, together with the country between the two.

We, the main body of the preliminary assault troops, are due at Algiers at dawn on Nov. 12.

Our first objective (which will be achieved before our arrival) will be to seize the port, the communication installation and the key points of Algiers, together with the aerodrome at Maison Blanche, about 12 miles east of Algiers and Blida (an important air base) some 30 miles south-west of Algiers.

Second objective will be to seize ports of Bougie to the east along the coast road, and, with airborne troops (because of the flying field there) Djidjelli.

That will be the end of the first phase. The object, of course, is to close in on the Afrika Korps as soon as possible ;



and a rapid advance on Tunis is essential. All plans are made to take over the ports of Philippeville and Bône as we advance, and to supply the army from there as it moves.

L. of C. will be based on Constantine, under General Clark with the main sub-base, to be manned by a brigade group at Sétif, under Mosley.

I gather that we have more than adequate air support of our own based on Gibraltar. The American 12th air force is twice the size of ours. Absolute confidence in the strength of air protection is officially expressed. I am doubtful. Gibraltar flying field is very small. It is stuffed with Hudsons.

To "this army of such mass and charge" a truly excellent pamphlet has been issued, explaining lucidly and admirably everything that any one could possibly want to know about the terrain, its inhabitants, customs, political standpoint (so far as known) and place in the strategic picture. But, in spite of warnings, I still feel that the political advisers are too optimistic. On the other hand the Germans have more or less immobilised the French, and there is very little petrol. There is no coal; and the Oran-Bizerta run is done with wood. We are importing locomotives later.

The German disarmament commission is in Algiers. Several hundred. It is hoped that a bit of smart "fifth columnism" (or, sixth, as I suppose it should be called) will wrap them all up before the assault begins.

We cannot take any sterling over 6d. into the country. This will cause trouble but can't be helped, for the Germans would flood the country with the notes they have. So, until local banking arrangements are made, we shall have a new Bank of England issue, British Military Authority notes, in units of £1, 10s., 5s., 2s. 6d., 1s. The rate is to be 300 to the £1. There's a currency shortage in Algeria.

Although the heat and burden will be borne by British troops the whole operation will be presented to the French by us as an American enterprise, and all contacts will be done by Civil Political Officers, all of whom are Americans. In all matters where it is necessary for the British military to "contact" the civil administration, the introduction will be done by one of these men.

If all goes as well as we dare hope it will take us about one month to reach Tunis. Much emphasis is laid on the



hard living that lies before us for at least 45 days. No bread, for instance, is likely to be baked for 60 days. It will do us good, if we can stand up to it.

I was not impressed by the way the officers took the breaking of the news. Practically every question asked was about pay : hardly one on the matter in hand ; but there is excuse for that. The army has been so abominably treated by muddles in the pay department and by the Treasury since the war began that they've got a slight persecution mania about it. The men were the same.

(I had to lecture to them on Russia to-night. I thought about fifty would turn up and the rest would be interested only in Algeria. About 600 came, and I never had such a reception in my life.)

We expect to go slap through the Straits of Gibraltar in the middle of Tuesday night, being due at A. at dawn Thursday. They hope in this way to avoid detection, but they won't. There's always a string of Spanish tunny fishing boats across the Straits, day and night, with which we must not interfere. I have no doubt there's an enemy agent on each one. And I dare say a wireless set here and there. I hope some of these Franco-fanciers realise what they've done.

*November 7.*—Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russian revolution. I was so tired after my lecture last night that I 'didn't put down all I ought to have done. So, because I've forgotten much this will be a disjointed entry.

First the navy. Their job begins and ends with the protection of ports. They'll throw a boom across the various harbours—Oran, Algiers, Bougie, Philippeville and Bône, and will provide smoke generators, which will be under the command of the R.A.F. but operated by the army. A muddle somewhere here.

Their chief harbour enemies are midget submarines, human torpedoes and E boats. It sounds like something out of *Chums*.

The naval strength is said to be formidable ; and everything that is sea-going is being taken care of. There are only submarines in Algiers.

Here, cruising merrily about, it is simply impossible to realise that zero-hour is dawn to-morrow, and that by Wednesday morning we shall be in the battle zone. Getting it hot and strong maybe. A destroyer, a few escort vessels

and a yacht are not much of an escort, but surely we shall pick up more when we get nearer.

The ship's captain is satisfied. We have an escort up there, he says, pointing to the sky. Thinking he meant Sunderlands I said I could see nothing. "God is invisible" he said. I wish I had his faith: it would be a comfort, but the price of it would be a surrender of reason. He says that Bishop Barnes is not a Christian: "he believes in Darwin."

Now for the air. The R.A.F. boys on board were deeply hurt that they weren't asked to address us yesterday, as were the army and navy representatives.

All bomber aircraft which are to take part in the first operation are based on Gibraltar. They will leave Gibraltar to-morrow before the aerodrome at which they are to land is in our hands: Maison Blanche. If they get there too early "it'll be just too bad for them."

Fighter cover will be provided from carriers.

D+2 (which means two days after zero hour) a wing of Hurricanes will come in and land, and two hours after that a wing of Spitfires. Forty-eight of each. Presumably at Maison Blanche also, and later, as soon as it's taken, at Blida.

We're bringing in (although at first fighters are the priority) G.R. aircraft, photo-reconnaissance aircraft, light bombers, Hurricane-bombers and American troop-transport planes for our own use. Strength of all these is to be built up day by day.

Blida is expected to be ready for our bombers at D+5. As we advance more airfields will be used, of course, notably Djidjelli, Philippeville and Bône.

Umbrellas of fighters will be up all day: night fighters will come later.

Main function of the Hudsons will be to bomb enemy ships. Light bombers are to give us close support along the coast road, and will do strategic bombing. Hurry-bombers will do the same. There will also be a number of torpedo bombers available.

Gradually the bomber strength will be built up by direct flight from Britain of light and heavy bombers. And why not from the Middle East? We might start a shuttle service.

The French have 260 bombers in N. Africa, 78 of which are in Algiers. No big effort is expected from them. Say



fifty sorties a day, rapidly decreasing. There are 272 French fighters in N. Africa, of which 100 are in Algeria. They are De Voitines (memories of my lovely flight during the Spanish War from Toulouse to Casablanca to find where the German guns in Spanish Morocco are or were. I flew then in a civil De Voitine) and Curtis, with a radial engine.

We can expect to see Junkers 88's, Heinkel 111's and a few Dornier 217's, from Cagliari in Sardinia, some 350 miles away. And maybe some Savoia Marchetti 79's and 84's, three-engined planes.

I hope all this R.A.F. "gen" as they call it, is what they call "pukka" and not "duff"!

Once in the country they think we'll have trouble with guerrillas. As Germany has more or less immobilised the French forces there, they have been trained to act as guerrillas, for which type of fighting the country is ideal. On the other hand it's not a country on which you can live easily.

It is also a country of bridges. Hundreds of them. If the French blow them up we shall be very hampered, although we're well supplied with them.

It's said that the Governor-General of Algeria is very pro-British. I'm frightened of this optimism, although I do feel that this has been very well prepared, and that unless there is more than 80 per cent hostility we shall be all right. Air force and navy are expected to be most hostile, as well as the troops we were mad enough to send there from Syria after we'd captured them.

I haven't been in Algiers since I was seventeen. I fell in love there, for the first time in my life! In those days I went to a *vin d'honneur* at the Residency, and tasted champagne for the first time in my life. Nivelles was governor then. This is a sad return, but I simply do not believe France has gone bad. I remember to-day what I once read in some book of Victor Hugo's, the genius with a little mind. "You cannot," he wrote, "pick the mark out of a nation as you can out of a handkerchief." He also said, "The protest of right against the fact persists for ever."

We forgot to zigzag this morning when every other ship did and were sent "to coventry" to the rear of the convoy. Shame!

American liaison man on board tells me that the U.S.



force attacking Casablanca to-morrow comes direct from the States.

*November 8.*—Now the world knows. It's too early yet to say anything, although this doesn't apply to the world's radio commentators. The only fact that seems to be certain so far (midday) is that Giraud has broadcast from Algiers, which means that we have the radio station.\* Which may mean much or little.

Wrote an article to-day about the convoy, but by the time it gets to London it will surely belong to long forgotten matters. History put on speed this morning. It is infuriating to be locked up here, miles from anywhere, and unable to write a word and send it.

Forgot to note (until it's too late to get any more) that Players are only 8d. for 20! And still packed in pre-war make-up with printing that now, after the two-colour packages at home, looks garish. And wrapped in cellophane.

Gave the officers a 40 minutes talk on Russia, with 40 minutes of questioning afterwards.

Another destroyer joined our escort to-day: it was the first ship we have seen since leaving.

We started taking Mepacrine yesterday against malaria: two tablets. Evidently "an old soldier" compiled the medical part of the excellent pamphlet with which we've been issued. Speaking of these Mepacrine tablets it says: "It is the duty of officers to ensure that all men take their tablets and swallow them." "And swallow" printed in italics.

Glad to notice also in the pamphlet a French-Italian dictionary contains the word "brothel." We're getting on. Not that the translation is as correct as it might be, which seems to argue a last lingering trace of hypocrisy. French translation is given as "boite de nuit," and Italian as "casino," which is a hit or miss suggestion.

*November 9.*—A ladybird appeared in the officer's lounge to-day. Whence? And live ants were scuttling on the table at dinner.

We all changed our money into B.M.A. notes. They are well printed on Bank of England paper, but are ugly as sin. I have never seen a well-designed note in any country in the world. It ought to be an easy matter to get one done.

\*Actually the broadcast was made in his name without his knowledge, before he had escaped from France. And it came from Gibraltar.

Why not ask Ted Kauffer to do the job? From this criticism I except the B. of E. fivers and upwards which are elegant and lovely.

Over 400 miles west of Gibraltar at noon. We are due to pass the Straits to-morrow at midnight. I hope I'll see the light on Cape Spartel. That spot has a great hold over my heart. I think I was more at rest there than I have ever been; and I cannot forget it.

Bomb-disposal squads are being formed to-morrow: this is among the first signs that we are nearing journey's end. It is my wedding day to-morrow. I would gladly be home for it. I have been home for only one since the war began.

Our destroyer stopped a Spanish merchantman this morning and boarded her. There is nothing—will Franco-fanciers please note—to prevent her from immediately informing their friends the Germans of the exact locality of our convoy, its speed and direction. Had the legitimate government won such danger would not have existed.

I wonder how many articles I wrote, how many speeches I made to this effect during and after the Spanish War. I might as well have been a dumb man addressing a congress of blind persons!

*November 10.*—Hudsons came early from Gibraltar to have a look at us and stayed around most of the day. There were gulls too—the first we have seen since leaving, although I have seen small birds every day—about 100 miles from Gibraltar at noon. Reckon we should see Spartel Light between 8 and 9.

I notice that we all, even now, still refer to "this country" when we mean home.

*Midnight.*—Half an hour after sundown saw the new moon over my shoulder, which is luck, this being my only superstition. I never saw her so beautiful or so serene: lying on her back like a delicately cut nail, transparent and that pale gold that manages to hold the promise of infinite delight. She had a full ring and floated in the first darkening blue of night.

She was gone when I went up to the sundeck at 8.10; but there was a lovelier light: Spartel. It infused, stabbed cleanly and then again infused the dark east with its white splendour. We have come to the great continent whose northern shores are to be the charge which will hurl us into



Europe. From the enslaved shores of Spain, which I have not seen since 1939, smaller lights shone ; and at about 10 the long necklace of Tangier's lamps decorated the night sky, now creamed with stars. We have slowed down ; and are only just passing Gibraltar. It is too far away to see, for we cannot be more than 4 or 5 miles from the headland north of Ceuta, on which in 1937 the Germans mounted a battery of 12-inch guns. No doubt they are still there.

It is calm : there is no white foam on the waters ; and we enter the Mediterranean like bits of paper carried on the tide. What will to-morrow bring ? Oh ! How lucky we have been so far : we have no right to hope that such tranquillity will long continue.

*November 11.*—Far to the north and high in the sky among whose clouds they looked hardly more than a shadow, the snow-laced summits of the Sierra Nevada were to be seen early this morning, like something in Keats' head. Thereafter no land all day.

No sign of any attack, but in the far distance what sounded like a few depth charges. A pity they were not dropped at the time of the Nyon agreement. Otherwise absolute peace. Opposite Oran five shiploads—mostly American—left us for that port.

*November 12.*—7 a.m. Algiers. The pleasure cruise is at an end ! The convoy has arrived without hearing a shot fired in anger. The city came out of the dawn like a flower, a pale carnation that blossomed into blinding white. And as we came in, anchoring just outside the harbour, the city came alive : glass in the windows, a mail van running across a bridge, the lattice of the wireless station and houses in which people live. No damage visible.

Here—although it seems strange—are the instruments of war : a balloon barrage, Spitfires overhead and innumerable small naval craft. The harbour is filled with French shipping which will be of great value to us.

We do not seem to be in a hurry : and may not go ashore all day, but that remains to be seen. Enemy submarines may be near, for several depth charges have been fired this morning. Extra precautions, maybe, for the boom is not yet completed. It should be ready in a couple of days.

11 p.m. Still on board. SNEFU as an American officer said at dinner when told of to-day's orders. Disembark,



order cancelled, order revived, order cancelled. Snefu means Situation Normal: Everything F——d Up. We disembark at 6.30 to-morrow, and try to find accommodation. Our colleagues seem to have found room in an hotel near here. Whatever this is, it will be better than the transit camp with which we're threatened. This, where the men will go, is in the Stadium, three miles march from here up-hill; and then sleeping in the open without cover of any kind. Transport is very scarce; and I could not do that march. My typewriter alone weighs over 20 pounds; and I could not leave it to the tender mercies of the baggage men.

There is still much political difficulty; and it would seem that these terms of the armistice are by no means settled. Darlan is free to come and go as he pleases. What, obviously, has happened is that the Americans think that if we recognise Darlan we shall get Vichy Frenchmen on our side; and that, therefore, Giraud at the moment is an embarrassment. It would not surprise me if Petain arrived here to-night or to-morrow, and we were to recognise that dishonourable and wretched traitor. There is some point in using Darlan for the moment; but as soon as he is no further use the best thing that could happen to him is that he should have an accident. I don't believe he could pull the French Fleet to our side.

Food is scarce: all British and U.S. troops are therefore forbidden to buy food or, it seems, drink. Our paper money is not liked—naturally, but I dare say that will be cured in time. What Algeria needs is about six months' peace and quiet to replenish her stores.

We have taken the eastern aerodromes with parachutists and airborne troops, and are holding by the skin of our teeth. Hence the rapidity of the drive east. There are allied troops in Bône to-night.

One day we shall be able to tell the truth about all this: that it is mainly a British operation, planned and fought by the British. But not for a long time.

The black-out is excellent. How they have managed it so quickly God knows. Great credit to someone for this; as indeed for the fact that the harbour is working normally: tugs, etc. all flying the White Ensign, pilots and so on. Stores are still being landed from the first convoy; everything we eat, fire, drive or ride comes from overseas.



The German disarmament commission is under house-arrest. Every one is too busy at the moment to do much more about them. A private in the E. Surreys captured the lot of them as they were trying to leave.

The day has gone very slowly. Since I was last here the town is much extended and contains what look like admirable modern buildings, in particular a large apartment block half-way up the hill. Like a Tekton design, but even simpler. But the interiors, I have no doubt are awful, as most French homes are.

The news about Darlan makes me more than ever anxious about the censorship. Criticism—should it prove necessary—will almost certainly be forbidden.

*November 13.*—What a day! The father and mother of headaches: almost blind with pain. To-day will have to be written to-morrow.

*November 14.*—Yesterday first. Disembarkation was scheduled for first light, but inevitably there was chaos, that sort of amateur bungling to which the army is liable when it tries to organise something outside routine. We were ready with packs, etc. at 6.15 as ordered, but didn't reach the end of the queue until 7.45! I walked up to the transit camp in the Zoo but found everybody so busy bewailing thefts that had taken place the previous night that I could get no sense out of them. McIntosh (our P.R.O.) and I then walked into the city, four miles, to look for our colleagues who were with the assault party. No one knew where anybody was, and the whole set-up was pure chaos behind which the first vague shadows of order were visible. Signals had been at work and First Army H.Q. had been established in the Hotel Albert which we found after walking half a mile in the wrong direction. This was pretty good for three days' work. The telephones worked, but no one replied from the other end.

Found Evelyn Montague, who as I'd suspected from hearing B.B.C., has got no news home. He says—and it's already obvious from other remarks that he's correct—that a frightful mess was made of the assault, and that if there'd been any real resistance, all would have been wiped out!

Food is very scarce. Lunched in a good class brasserie; there was vegetable *hors d'œuvres*, tomatoes stuffed with



vegetables and orange. Plenty of wine. No coffee, butter, olive oil, chocolate here for more than two years !

I am settled for the night in a room with two others and only two beds. That is a measure of the accommodation available. No one in authority will make up his mind to requisition or to fix an exchange rate, with resultant chaos. I'm considered lucky to have got 250 francs for one B.M.A. pound, although the rate is to be fixed 300. Barclays Bank are giving only 200.

I fear that there is going to be the most frightful delay in returning our messages home. And chaos. H.Q. in Gibraltar are putting out communiqués that seem to me quite wrong. And what's worse from my point of view is that the political censors in Gibraltar are said to be a bunch of amateurs who will even rewrite our copy. If this is so I will have someone's head on a charger. It's quite obvious already that Clark proposes to make Darlan boss. I can understand this, for we have no strength here, but I must, while explaining, within the limits of reasonable censorship, the reason for this explain that, abhorrent as the move is, it is expedient. I can do no more for them than that.

I drove out to the aerodrome at Maison Blanche to see Eisenhower, who flew in this morning, but missed him : he'd just left for Gibraltar. Afterwards, to see Clark, who impressed me as a quick sensible fellow, but naïve. Any one he disapproves of he calls a "Yebsob," which is a private code description between himself and Eisenhower. Yebsob means "yellow-bellied son of a bitch." He announced Darlan's appointment but was awkward when asked what he thought we could do to explain so disgusting an example of opportunism away. It can be, as I've written above, explained away, but I daren't do it lest the political censors try and cut out the criticism and leave only the excuse. This sums up the situation :

"Darlan has now been recognised as the civil and political administrator in French North Africa by the United States and has sent a message to all French forces in Tunisia to resist Axis aggression to the utmost. This peculiar, and to some people abhorrent, twist of history was made public to-day by General Eisenhower who flew in here this



morning from Gibraltar with Admiral Cunningham and with him returned there late this afternoon.

“Eisenhower himself was not present at the conference at which this major political decision was made, but afterwards he met those who had attended under the chairmanship of his deputy, Lieutenant-General Clark. Present at the conference—which in effect was the signature of the peace treaty, many details of which still remain to be settled—were Darlan, Nogues, Giraud, Juin, Cunningham and the United States Consul, Murphy, who acted as interpreter. Other decisions arrived at include the appointment of Nogues as Governor of Morocco, Chatel, Algeria and Esteva, Tunisia. The appointment of Commander-in-Chief of all the French Fighting Forces has yet to be made and it is safe to assume that Giraud, the value of whose devoted work for the Allied cause cannot be exaggerated, will play an important part in any future reorganisation. Eisenhower also agreed in the name of the Allied Governments to re-equip the French forces which have been left in a dangerously weak position and to bring in food for the civilian population who have not seen any butter or coffee for more than two years and who are short of every commodity except wine. The military obligations assumed by France are to be purely defensive, and so far no offensive roles have been forecast for them in the campaigns which lie ahead.

“To-day expediency must dictate to those who are charged with shaping the first outlines of the future, and however shocked and horrified men may be the world over at the knowledge that Darlan is to live in a palace and not in a dungeon, I believe from what information there is at my disposal that this solution, however ethically reprehensible, is a practical one. The high command believe, and time alone will show whether they are correct in their assumption, that Darlan is the only man to whom the greater part of all the French Fighting Forces will listen. He has now invited the French Fleet to come out and in a short time we will know if their ears were open when he called.”

The French are mobilising. Which is a pity. They will clog up the railways, and will be no good. They have no arms and no soul left.

*November 14.*—This is what I tried to buy to-day and



failed. A Guide Bleu to North Africa, typing paper, paper clips, handkerchiefs, soap. With the latter you could buy any one's virtue. There is a lot of perfume. I sent some home to R.

Anderson gave us a conference this morning. I was not impressed. This is what, after a lot of wine at lunch, I wrote about him and Clark :

"Only a few hundred yards from the unpretentious Hotel d'Angleterre, overlooking the port, where the Italian Disarmament Commission in Algiers made their headquarters and from which they were removed to prison this afternoon amid the loud jeers of the local population, Lieut.-General Kenneth Noel Arthur Anderson, General Officer Commanding the British First Army, has now made his headquarters. But not for long. Within the next few days, thanks to the fact that his forces—nine-tenths British, one-tenth American—are already well ahead of their schedule, he will be moving his staff forward.

"Although Anderson is in command of this First British Army, the correct name for those who are actually here to obey his orders is 'Eastern Task Force.' Its precise composition will vary from time to time and will be determined by whatever troops Eisenhower feels able to relieve from other duties elsewhere for the immediate purposes of Anderson's campaign which are first to smash Rommel and then to drive him out of Africa together with the battered remains of the Italian Army groups under his command. The United States percentage will therefore vary according to circumstances.

"How he proposes to achieve the orders given him Anderson explained this morning in the converted bedroom that he has made his headquarters. It is a small room from one of whose windows can be seen the impressive mass of Allied shipping now moored in the harbour and disgorging hourly from more than half a hundred vast bellies men and armour with which these orders will be put into effect. It is a simple room in which there is hardly enough space to swing a cat, and in addition that plethora of armchairs with which French hoteliers the world over cram their rooms. There is also a railed-off bath half-concealed by exiguous yellow curtains that match the upholstery and curtains. The



walls are decorated by several small-scale maps, none of them as detailed as you usually find pinned on a general's walls. One of them indeed is a map of the world issued as advertisement by some commercial house. Only two pins adorn these maps : one stuck in the port of Alexandria and one at Mersa Matruh ; and on that which covers the whole of North Africa, from the Belgian Congo to the Mediterranean, someone has written ' Libia ' in ink, and spelled it wrong. A cheap, rough desk and a glass-covered bookcase pretty well complete the room's furniture. There are two telephones—one the usual candlestick type, is a civil telephone (which no one uses except for the most innocent purposes), and a more solid and businesslike instrument which Signals installed as soon as they arrived.

" Anderson, who is obviously unused to saying very much in public, looks more like a moderately successful surgeon who has just attained a haven in Queen Anne Street than like a soldier. He is nearly 51—he will be on Christmas Day—but he looks older—not that his face, in which are set two blue eyes, is lined, because it isn't, but it has that fresh, open-air appearance which you see in the countenances of those who have always taken care of their health. His grey hair is thin and untidy, but none the less he radiates a kind of suppressed energy and seems to convey the impression that he knows both how to husband and expend it.

" The U.S. General Clark is a very different kettle of fish. To start with, although he is only four years younger than Anderson, he looks young enough to be his son. You may guess his age as anything between 36 and 42, but not a day older. His dark hair is as thick as a boy's and he has all the alertness you would expect to find in a man half his age. He has set up his headquarters in a different and more luxurious hotel than Anderson's and at the moment he seems more concerned about acquiring an extra flagpole so that he may fly both the British and the U.S. flag in his grounds than about anything else. But that is only part of his obviously amazing energy, for if any man in this war has had a worrying time he has, ever since he arrived here and tried to reconcile Frenchmen of half a dozen different opinions so that they might all work to the same end. He claims to have succeeded. Despite the highly unpleasant



and to some of us revolting decision to which he came—the installing of Darlan as the civil and political head of all North Africa—there is no doubt that he was guided in this matter by his head rather than his heart, which is a sign of potentially good generalship.

“To look at him as he sits stretched out in the uncomfortable chair in his bedroom, you would think he had done nothing more strenuous than get up half an hour earlier than usual. He is completely unruffled and seems to have taken the whole business in his stride and to have been slightly amused by it into the bargain. He speaks more freely than does Anderson and seems to relish the storm of questions, all of which he answers candidly if not always convincingly. He even makes his choice of Darlan appear to be the best possible solution for the troubles of this tormented place to which virtually he has transferred the immediate government of Metropolitan France, and to which he has succeeded in attaching the loyalty of by far the greater number of French citizens here. Frenchmen were ripped asunder and their loyalties scattered to the winds of heaven by their defeat and their internal bitternesses were profound. To have found some means of coagulating these bitternesses and focusing the force they are capable of generating against the common foe is to have achieved no mean victory. It is greatly to Clark's credit that with the force at his disposal he succeeded, so he claims, in a comparatively few hours.

“Unlike Anderson's room, Clark's is not that of a soldier : it is more like the bedroom of a tourist, complete with photographs of his family, a travelling clock and all the usual impedimenta with which the globe-trotter unnecessarily loads himself. But do not be deceived by these baubles : here is a man who knows his business, I feel, for he could not radiate such confidence if he had not it inside him.”

Lunched at Algiers' best restaurant and took two guests. Filthy *hors d'œuvre*, worse so-called lamb, and the best Roquefort I ever tasted. 300 francs which is now officially £1. The exchange is being declared to-night after a lot of silly hawing by the Americans. Much as I love that country, I have to say that as administrators and suppliers, they are incompetent. *Trop de zèle*, maybe : the fault of all adolescents.



The Germans have sucked the coastal belt dry. Until a month ago, when the potatoes were harvested the Germans had a guard on every field to see that no one took a root. And there is now no seed in the country. We ought to rush some here.

They took the Italian disarmament commission away to-day. A poor bunch in cissy uniforms. The French booed them. They would not do that to the Germans : they are frightened of them and respect them. I do not yet understand their attitude to their conquerors : it strikes me so far as being that of the broken slave to his master. I hope, I pray not. That is a disease of the soul that will take generations to eradicate. Perhaps, after all, Victor Hugo was wrong, unless, which I am loath to believe, the mark of the nation was avarice.

Saw Randolph Churchill, looking very lonely. He goes out of his way to create an unfavourable legend about himself, which is a pity. He is quick, sensible, intelligent—but hysterical. And feels it, I think, hence the protective armour of rudeness.

I go to Bône to-night to represent all British journalists.

*November 15.*—We left Agha station at 1.30 this morning in a train of 3 coaches and 39 trucks. They carry lorries, oerlikons, carriers. Men are packed like sardines, but cheerful. Coming late I got put in a third-class carriage and was glad. It was for nine and as there were only four I stretched out and slept all night. By nine we had done only 120 kms, and don't look like getting into Bône (which, it seems, is being perpetually raided) until to-morrow evening.

Every time the train stops the men shout out, "next stop Waterloo." I wish it were.

Poverty here is extreme : worse even than in Egypt and if there is a public health service it can only be in theory.

Of imperial powers I once heard it said that the British take all but the bone and gristle, the Italians all but the bone and the French even digest that themselves. It looks like it. Two Algerine farmers said they were very short of corn and had seen no milk, which is an important part of their exiguous diet, for months.

Because the last harvest has recently been cut and the stubble is still on the land, it looks a barren world. The vines

are cut down for winter and look like bits of tarred rope laid on frozen land.

On either side are the two northern Atlas ranges, often rising to peaks so symmetrical that they seem to be cones spun by hand. All, all day, have collars of cloud that do not move and are like poised granite.

The journey is very slow, but it is a miracle that it is being made at all ; for that the trains would run immediately was in no man's calculation. We are moderately protected, for the Brens in the carriers are manned lest, as we get near the end of our journey, there should be a few roaming armoured cars. It is unlikely, for I doubt if the enemy knows how few men we have at Bône. We are bluffing them as we bluffed the French. Tanks are on the way, but how many have been landed at Bône we do not know. And there can hardly be more than a brigade there, at the best.

To-night's sunset was the finest I ever saw, but it did not endure. It was as though huge slabs of earth had been heated to red temperatures and then, by some gigantic natural convulsion, flung against the sky. Small black clouds were suspended clinkers. The whole thing cooled in five minutes, and it was night.

I have a sleeping bag from Fortnums, lined with lambs' fleece. It was not too hot last night.

*November 16.*—It is bitterly cold. The horse dung on the station rails is frozen. We spent the latter part of the night at Kroubs ; and leave in half an hour for Bône. It is 8.30, and the sun has not yet dispelled the mists.

I would dearly love to have heard the church bells in England (preferably from the top of a Cotswold hill) on Sunday. Their ringing is reported here to-day.

British troops are past Cyrene. I remember what Mat Halton saw there. On a wall an Italian had written : "I am Guido Anselmo : a soldier of Rome." Underneath, an Australian had written : "Listen, Guido. I eat b—— soldiers of b—— Rome for my b—— breakfast." He ought, if he's still there, to be well nourished to-day.

We are well nourished. A company of the Light Artillery have taken me under their wing. The British soldier is a perennial marvel. We are not stopped two minutes at halting stations before he's found a fire or is



building one. Ten minutes later there is a hot meal. Stew, excellent treacle pudding, tea for lunch yesterday. Sausages, biscuits and jam for supper, and this morning at 8 more delicious stew and tea.

If communications between Bône and Algiers are at all possible, I shall try and push on to Tunisia.

We are welcomed everywhere, with, I think, sincerity. We are the harbingers of food. Not that the situation is so bad here, in the countryside. There are eggs, and a little milk is to be had. Our own tea is made from a tin containing tea, powdered milk and sugar. It is not as bad as it sounds. The men are enjoying themselves, and looking forward to trouble. I wonder how they'll like it when they get it.

I hope this enterprise of mine is sensible. I am the only British journalist to undertake it, as Anderson would only allow one to go. How long I shall stay depends on what's going on. Anyhow there'll be interest at home in the sort of life the men are leading. I shall try to fly back : this journey is too long, for we are not due until this evening. About 7, the betting is.

A young Canadian, just escaped from prison in Tunis, has just passed this station on his way to Algiers ; he says the French are waiting anxiously for us. It's a case of " Sister Anne, Sister Anne, d'you see any one coming ? " If we're quick we ought to have Tunis before long : the Germans have very few men there, but a considerable number of planes. The Canadian was a merchant seaman interned after being torpeoded.

As far as Sétif, we carried a company of Pioneers, who got out then to act as maintenance and defence troops of the aerodrome. The Pioneers, for the most part good old soldiers, are very sensitive and tell you that they're considered " the lowest of the low." This, natural I suppose, is grossly unfair. Without them and their willingness, and indeed, in some degree, skill, the army would be lost. They dig, build, repair, clean and turn their grimy hands to any job. And, if it came to a tight corner, they'd make as useful fighters as any body of men. Most of them were in the last war, and between them have a good quota of M.M.'s. But no discipline.

Many of the mountains here are smooth, rounded and grey, like elephant's behinds.



Millions of small birds flew over us this afternoon, like a photographic negative of the Milky Way, for here and there was a larger bird.

The Germans will not get the olive crop this year: it will not be ready for harvesting for another two weeks. It looks a good crop.

Bône was scheduled for capture on D+17, i.e. 25th of this month. It's already a friendly town and the naval control has been there since D+5.

This countryside wears all the graces of peace: naked and grinning girls bathing in the rivers, men ploughing, hanging about stations, playing boule and riding donkeys. I keep thinking of Porquerolles and how I lived there after the last war and was happy.

One of the R.A.F. regiment who landed on Sunday said that when they crept ashore expecting heavy resistance, they found twelve motor buses waiting for them to take them to their objective.

We got in about 10.30 and went to the L'Orient where a deaf Hindu, with a British-Indian passport, was the night porter. He looks like a conjurer stranded while on tour.

Put "in the picture" as the army says, by the Brigadier. We have advanced into Tunisia, and set up brigade H.Q. at Tabarka, just across the frontier. Too tired to sleep well.

*November 17.*—To 78th Divisional H.Q. in a rope factory where, after interminable waiting, saw General Eveleigh. He has charm, common sense and looks competent. He is trying to do a lot with very little. We have made contact with the enemy about 20 miles inside Tunisia, but in what strength he is we do not yet know. We have only one battalion operating, but it's hoped that another will be put in to-night. We have no armour and there is no air support. It sounds like the same old story. This time, however, air support is lacking because of the difficulties of petrol supply. The Spits here are using 50 tons a day; and there are only 75 left. Three tankers are due to-day. They would have come in at dawn but there's an enemy submarine just outside, and at the moment we can't do more than throw stones at it.

It was dealt with this evening and 300 tons were landed. More, much more, is on the way and Spitfires are expected.

Raids most of the day, but little damage. Light A.A.



(heavy is on the way) and the fighters disorganised their aim, but they were, even so, unpleasantly close.

Divisional H.Q. is put in the silliest place—across a long bridge that the Germans are trying to destroy. They dropped three duds very close to it this morning. If one had gone off the bridge would have buckled.

A Commando unit is also in the rope factory. Cheerful, filthy and very tired. Their job emphasises that inherent simplicity of spirit in all men, and leaves out the unnecessary insincerities that spoil most human characters. It is a pleasure to be with them: they are real—like a glass of good water. We have permission to travel to the Tunisian front in a column going up this afternoon.

*November 18.*—We assembled at dusk last night in the roads outside Bône, each truck halted beneath a tree. It was cheerless and pouring with icy rain. Bombers were over, flying very low, and as the sky darkened the scarlet tracers of our A.A. crept vividly towards them. One Junkers 88 flew not 50 feet above our head.

As we drove out of Bône, between the railway and the docks, two bombs fell close to us and blew one of our motor cyclists off his machine. It was nothing to me because I didn't realise how close a shave we'd had until Ned Russell said, this morning, "Wasn't that a terrifying exit from Bône?" Perhaps I'm lucky to be that way.

We had lukewarm soup before we started; and then I got in the open A.A. truck (it has two Brownings) and we started. It took about 90 minutes to get going: and then, in the middle of the air raid we took the wrong turning and had to drive back through it! It was frightfully cold, but the men being adepts know how to keep warm. I don't, and a tin hat is always the draught's paradise.

The sky cleared, the horizon opened and the wind dried our clothes. Having had no sleep (no real sleep) for days I was infinitely tired and in that state where inanimate things become alive. Each tree and bush means something; and so do the clouds. They were fantastic: in them I saw a masked hangman playing a fiddle, a Renoir woman with a black cat lying on her face, Lloyd George, and an ectoplasmic figure with an illuminated face like something from an El Greco. The moon looked like Ribbentrop with a hangover.

We drove without lights through a world that was dead, but from whose infinite grave, voices sometimes wished us well.

When we came down to the sea at La Calle, it was shining at the edge where the great foam rode on the waters.

They told us German parachutists had landed in the area, but we decided not to believe them. Then up a great hill, whose every stone and tree was a man. A faint light on the road stopped us: not glowworms, as it might have been, but a lonely picket to warn us of a bomb crater.

The road is packed with moving trucks, all going up with men and the more essential supplies. Such was the jam, and such was the shortage of hiding places at Tabarka, our destination, that they turned back all but the most essential and sent us into the forests on the hill; and here we sat, shivering, until dawn came.

Then we moved down a track into the woods and hid ourselves beneath branches and nets. We were not quite quick enough. Before the last truck could move the Messerschmitts came and chopped one of our men in half. Our first casualty. He was dead before he fell, and can have had no appreciable spasm of pain. I dived for the ditch and was soaked again. I'd have been wet in any case, for the hail came then and banged on my helmet like ancient bullets. Nothing could have kept the wet out. Or the cold. I have not been so miserable since I was machine-gunned from the air by a Heinkel in Bilbao on Coronation Day.

I had work to do, alas, so I could not stay in that security of dripping trees. When the ration truck went up I went with it along ground where there was no cover. Fortunately the hail came again, but I was taking no chances. I stood up above the screen and kept a look-out. We saw nothing.

From the cliffs above, Tabarka looked lovely, with an ancient fort on the little promontory. I forgot the fighters for a moment. They have dropped a few small bombs in Tabarka, but nothing much. As a breath of wind would double most of its houses up, some had slid gently to the ground, retaining their component parts, as though folded on hinges. Very odd indeed.

A camouflaged Bofors at the crossroads looked like a statue of Civic Pride or something on which men had laid wreaths.



I said "good-bye" to the boys here and walked up the road to Brigade H.Q. It had cleared and the fighters were back, so I had to play musical chairs from tree to tree and ditch to ditch. The Germans have the air to themselves. Due (a) to the fact that what fighters we have got are needed at Bône to cover the arrival of essential supplies, (b) shortage of petrol—but it's coming in well, and (c) the maintenance crews are not up yet.

This is a barren place, between here and the hills there is no cover for a mouse. Brigade H.Q. in a cork factory, a three-walled shed with the front open; and a hysterical G.2 to make everything fine and jolly. The brigadier looked very tired and ill. They have had a thin time and all want to know when the tanks and fighters are coming. "This is France over again" one officer said; but, of course, it isn't. The tanks are on their way up, and are to mass at Souk-el-Arba. The fighters will be here in a couple of days. But I know how he felt: the man on the spot finds it difficult to understand what is happening elsewhere, and much may be forgiven him. I suddenly realised that I hadn't eaten for twenty-four hours and was hungry. Excellent stew and tea; and new heart as a result.

There is no air raid signal here. Someone blows a whistle if they see anything, and a long-short means the A.A. is going to fire.

The situation is delicate. One of our battalions (W. Kents) met an enemy "jock column" of 15 Mark IV tanks, two companies of motorised infantry and a troop of field artillery at Djebel Abiod. Enemy much stronger and making for the pass over which the road goes. He's dug in now, using tanks as pillboxes, and is trying to blast us off the road. Another battalion (my hosts of the night: the Argyll's) are on their way.

We've knocked out at least eight tanks. We've lost all our four 2-pounders, and four 25-pounders. The latter have been replaced to battery strength.

We shall hold all right if we get air cover very soon. The Germans only want the pass: they're not likely to come any farther. Their object is to capture quickly any point from which they can impede in any way our advance into Tunisia when it begins.

Farther south at Beja they're patrolling to discover our



strength. The place is held by French troops and we've sent 500 British parachutists to help them.

As the brigadier wouldn't let us go any farther (I wasn't sorry) we got aboard an American truck and drove back to Bône. Soaked again and very cold. The truck had been shot up badly that morning and was full of holes.

*November 19.*—After four hours' sleep wrote 1500 words, which is too much but I enjoyed it, and got it sent off to the aerodrome. God knows when and in what form it will reach London.

Took steps to get a car. Public Relations, being the Cinderella of the army, have failed to provide adequate transport, or staff.

While 2nd lieutenants who are young enough to be my son have everything fetched and carried for them, war correspondents, having no status, must do everything for themselves. They have no rights, but are done favours. I have no complaint about the lack of favours, but the W.O. method of selecting—or rather not selecting—war correspondents, means that ultimately the more responsible among us not only have our very arduous work to do, but must live down the reputation of the bad ones. A bad egg being more widely advertised than a good.

The W.O. should itself have selected correspondents and stood no nonsense from the Press. (I might not be one if they had. They are so ill-informed that at the beginning of the war they wanted to reject me on the grounds that I was a communist. Which is what the then Brass Hats called any one who had actively supported the legitimate government of Spain.)

*November 20.*—By rolling my eyes and generally making myself agreeable (which it was, in any case a pleasure to do) I got a car. A Citroen 11 h.p. that hasn't been on the road for two years. The army gave me a new battery, which is what it wants; and it seems to run well. I also wangled a requisition for petrol and oil from the army; and went round to stock up. Tank holds 9 gallons, and I've got 16 more in the back. Also two boxes of rations, enough officially for 28 men for one day. They are admirable and contain among other things, sausages, bacon, steak and kidney puddings, potatoes, biscuits, chocolate, salt, matches, sweets, butter, jam, tea and milk and sugar dried in tins, beans,



and what with a delightful touch of delicacy is called "macedoine of vegetables." Why not "mixed"? also procured a number of tommy cookers. And bully, and fruit.

Being still soaked I went out to ordnance and got two pairs of socks, which was the best I could do.

The stores they have rushed up are immense and impressive. I could not resist writing a long article of praise for those who have organised this thing. Petrol is pouring in; and there are walls of ammunition boxes in the woods. We might have been here a couple of months, with no raids, instead of only a few days and about four times as many raids.

*November 21.*—Drove out to a nunnery with Randolph Churchill to buy some vegetables. Leeks, carrots, spinach and all a luxury. They wouldn't sell us chickens until I suggested we each give 100 francs for the orphans whom the nunnery—an order from Nancy—supports. Then the Mother Superior sold us a couple of fat hens. About 4s. each. A gay, twinkling old nun with black teeth brought the hens out alive, strung upside down with their legs tied together; and when we expressed our horror at having to kill them, thought it very amusing that we should dislike blood. Then and there she twisted the wretched birds' necks.

*November 22.*—78th Divisional H.Q. has moved forward to Ghardimaou in the central plain.

Found a colleague at the aerodrome at 2, where I met a splendid character: Wing Commander Hugo, who is a South African. He tells me that in South Africa, fathers leave their estates to their youngest sons, on the supposition that the older ones will already have made their way. He is the youngest but one of six. The other five are serving in the Middle East. He has five sisters. Three are nurses in the Middle East. He has a D.S.O. and D.F.C. A pretty good family record.

We started out for Souk Ahras, meaning to go on in the morning to Ghardimaou. A long climb over the mountains without lights, which was a bit of a strain, as I was unused to this car. It goes like a bird. A lovely rich moon soon after dark; and hills like thin paper masks. Billeted ourselves, thanks to an obliging town major, in the town hall.

Good honest food for almost the first time since landing. The local café did wonders. They must have served several hundred when we went in, but in spite of no electric light



(bombing at Bône had smashed the cables) they gave us lentil soup, an omelette, a blanquette of veal, which was spoiled by lack of onions, and stuffed aubergines. We had two bottles of wine. Total bill for four : 10s. or 2s. 6d. a head. Slept like a top, exhausted.

*November 23.*—The car wouldn't start. Ran it several miles downhill, but it jerked horribly, so had it towed to the local garage, where they found the push rods bent double, and the valves rusted in. By offering a good price I got five mechanics on it, and in three hours they had ground the valves, decarbonised it, straightened the rods and made minor adjustments. Total charge, 17s. 6d. including lavish tips !

We rode off through wild and barren country, climbing into the cold clouds. The country changed. Dark pitted rock, striated with slabs of moss, rose above small trees far down the valleys, through which fighters roamed, looking for prey. Then a belt of oaks, like Surrey, almost suburban in their prim order ; and over the high pass down long ribbons of white road into the plains.

78th Division has gone on to Souk-el-Khemis, and Ghardimaou is left to the French, who are busy repairing their shattered honour. But only on the surface, I fear. They have been well and truly licked ; and something inside them has gone rotten. The polluting hand of Germany has reached even here and they are "pourris." All the Germans left them were .22 tubes in their rifles with which to defend themselves against the Arabs. But some had hidden aviation spirit and had decamouflaged military cars ; and these they were bringing out. But it is all more in the nature of a gesture than anything else. Spirit is not there, only an ersatz belief in themselves which they know to be ersatz. It is a frightful tragedy for men that this should have happened.

Through this benign and treeless plain it is no pleasure now to drive a closed car, for M.E. 109's lurk in the clouds and pop out to shoot up transport. Souk-el-Arba has been bombed, the airfield badly. I counted nine damaged Spitfires. There were burned-out trucks at the roadside.

Tremendous activity everywhere, with the American tanks dispersed on both sides of the road. But very few infantry. I have yet to be convinced that we are not trying



to do too much with too little. Maybe we should wait until the force is massed up here—a fortnight's job I should say. If we do, of course, it will have given the enemy time to make more adequate dispositions, let alone to bring more troops from the mainland.

78th Divisional H.Q. is in an isolated farmyard, occupies the house and most of the outbuildings, but doesn't seem in any way to impinge on farm life, which is as dirty, noisy, quarrelsome and full of real peace as it is the world over.

We were offered a convoy to Tabarka, through the hills.

*November 24.*—After a nerve-racking drive last night we made Tabarka. We climbed an invisible range of hills, spiralled down to the valley and so came in from the south, past and through three bomb craters which did the springs no good. It was raining all the time. Kent Lemon suggested we run up to Djebel Abiod, so I took the car and one colleague and went. The others went back to La Calle. It was a wonderful drive. I could do an easy sixty nearly all the way. The moon was high and painted a strange world : golden on the north and black on the south. The north was as bright and as clean as the desert at Mena sometimes is in December dusk. It was ravishing : I could have driven for ever. We crossed two fords with cemented bottoms ; and the water sprayed up like fans on either side, garish as an illuminated Seine fountain. Pickets were out, but the password "Black Watch" let us through quickly. The sentries were very excited because, they said, the Germans had captured one of our armoured cars and were careering madly up and down the road in it. I thought it better not to believe them : the troops will believe anything and everything. After the last picket we drove about ten miles and thought we might be getting near, particularly as some four miles back they'd told us it was safe to drive only three more miles. So we stopped when we saw a man. He was an artillery spotter who begged me most civilly to move my car, as it was in full view of the enemy and shining in the moon. I was delighted to oblige. We stayed talking for some minutes with this imperturbable creature, who might have posed for a model of what a good soldier ought to be ; and then, as all was quiet, and for both our own sakes and for those of the men in the village of Djebel Abiod, we had no wish to start a row, we turned back and drove to La Calle along the via



Dolorosa of the American truck. They gave me tea and a delicious stew in the military hospital there ; and I had an hour's sleep. They had just brought in a lot of wounded Commandos, shot up that evening in the train on the way from Bône. A bad business, which should never have happened. I must have been dead tired to have slept so innocently and without nightmares after tea and stew. Then on to Bône. Ran out of petrol in a hail storm, and, having no funnel, had to wait for a pause. Wasted half the petrol pouring it in, so stupidly are army cans designed.

Wrote a story at once and took it to the aerodrome, then breakfast with Churchill : white wine, vermouth and biscuits : a mistake. There is still no field cashier in Bône, which reflects badly on the Pay Corps. Drank wine with Seymour Barry, who is here with an A.A. battery, and lunched with C. out at the Transatlantique, the crack hotel of Bône. Other than the omelette, food awful. He was delighted with Cripps' disappearance from the War Cabinet, says the victory in Egypt gave Winston enough power to dispose of him. I am more indifferent than I expected to be. Cripps should have resigned on the P.M.'s India speech if he was going to get out : on its tone, that is, not on its substance.

Went to the docks to watch two ships of convoy there come in. All pioneers. What we need are fighting men. Then, after hearing the news, to bed at five. The Russians are after the Germans, my prophecy that they will lick them this year may yet come true.

I am worn out, and realise every day that I am not thirty any more. This sort of fatigue was nothing to me then. *November 25.*—E. M. had an extraordinary dream last night : that he had been appointed professor of ancient history at Harvard, and was scheduled to deliver an inaugural address of two hours. The subject was one on which he knew nothing. In the dream he arrived 1 hour and 40 minutes late, due to not being able to find his trousers, and similar bothers, and on arrival was still unaware of the subject on which he was expected to address his audience. Someone slipped a paper in his hand asking him to lecture on "Why more people are called Harold than William."

We drove off to advanced Divisional H.Q. at about 11, through Souk Ahras, through the plain to Souk el Khemis,



to find 78th Division had moved on, and are now in the oddest of places. I wrote this feature about the life there :

“Just before dawn the temperature falls almost to freezing point, and then the pigs, who have been moderately silent since midnight, start shuffling in the sty, moving closer to one another that they may extract what warmth they may from one another's graceless bodies. They squeal in the process, and that is the beginning of the day.

“The guard comes round, stamping his feet in the harsh mud to make them warm, and with something less than his daytime cheerfulness orders the men to ‘Stand to.’ ‘Standing to’ is a lengthy process here for it is no fun for even the most disciplined troops to leave the scanty shelter of their blankets and climb out into the last naked moments of darkness. There are always clouds at this hour, so that the small light of the waning moon is hidden ; and we are alone in a vast world whose edges might still conceal beneath her ponderous and icy cloak.

“But not for long must we endure that solitude, in which neither war nor peace have any place, for in the east, above the barren ridge from which only a few short hours ago came the flash of our artillery, the first light, pale as salt icicles, comes into the sky and encircles us with mountains. Our immediate world is still made up of noises and of farmyard smells, of a motor bicycle starting so that a despatch rider may be well out of the plain before the full day brings its complement of enemy fighters, hunting the traffic on the roads, of a distant tank whose tractors on the hard road sound like an approaching typhoon, of the hyena in the fields going hurriedly to ground, of the first wind of morning in the eucalyptus trees above our heads, of distant cocks crying the approach of day ; and always, and above all else, the moaning of the pigs beyond the wall.

“When the first light becomes carnation and infuses the sky with the promise of sun, small birds rise from the fields and sing, and slowly Divisional Headquarters comes into sight, as though it had sprung suddenly from the earth. It has no colour yet, only outline and substance, but within ten minutes it is there. It is not a prepossessing place, but in peace-time it is rich. To-day the harvesting machines and the ploughs are rusty : the little white house and its out-



buildings want a coat of paint, but in spite of the ravages of the enemy there is life here. There are snow-white turkeys in the pound, and hens ; and there are doves who wheel round our heads whenever the enemy machine-guns fire too close for their liking. There are cattle and goats ; and, flopping about in the mud, there are fat ducks whose equanimity not even a neighbouring bomb can easily disturb.

“ Beside the pigsty, where we sleep, the military police keep their motor bicycles ; and they lie down to uneasy rest beside them. Opposite, across the courtyard, is the hut where the general sleeps. He was late this morning, and not out before full light, for he only got in at six after a drive throughout the whole of his extended sector. One by one the officers and men come from their camouflaged lorries, from bogus haystacks that they have built, and from beneath the eucalyptus trees which give the farm its shade in summer. Morning has begun, but for those who direct the battle it makes little difference whether it be night or day. The blacked-out signals lorry has been at work all night, and in the ‘ Ops Room,’ which is the inside of a truck, men have been writing in coloured inks on the glossy talcum that covers their maps. Red is our colour, blue is for the enemy, and as the chinagraphs make their hieroglyphics on the transparent surface, so can you see written messages being translated into visible symbols of position. There is a mine-field here : a battery there. X force is moving towards Y through the hills : enemy parachutists were reported here : the armoured force has just been switched north-west and given Z as an objective to be reached by nine this morning. It is all here for those who care to read and can first prove to the sentries at the gate that they are entitled to enter this domain.

“ As the last clouds of night move away on the southern wind there comes the sound of planes, and someone in authority blows a whistle calling to the curious to take cover quickly lest we be seen. We are well camouflaged ; so well indeed that at two hundred yards distance you can see nothing but the beasts and the Arab farmhands and their rusty implements of peace. Rusty they are while ours which are the instruments of war shine brightly beneath their camouflage. From the east come the Messerschmitts on



their first murderous round of day. Often it is their last until dusk for soon after they first appear and start shooting up the road, the Spitfires come over, not as the enemy do, in ones and twos and threes, but nine and twelve at a time to scour the pale aluminium sky with their fierce guns.

"This morning the Germans sent us two of their latest fighters: Fokker Wolfe 190's, which almost shaved our chins for us as we were leaning over the drinking trough in the farmer's yard. They flew at twenty feet above the ground, the fastest things in the sky; and a second or so later had skimmed the hill tops and were away. Later, the Spitfires came, and shot one down on its way home.

"These thorough Germans are as regular as the Greenwich time signal, and come over to be knocked down at regular hours of day. Usually we postpone our morning wash until they have gone away but we do not waste our time.

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"We make cooking stoves out of old biscuit tins, half fill them with earth, soak them with petrol, and then fry our rations. We had sausages this morning, and apricot jam on buttered biscuits; and we washed it down with a pint of tea. The only things with which the army fails to provide us are pepper and mustard, but the old hands have brought theirs and there is no lack. The general has his conference: the liaison officers ride in from the various sectors of the front; and the day's operations are planned or modified. Then the general takes an airing in the field but always within safe distance of the haystack, for if he will not camouflage himself, how can the others be expected to do so. But they do so expect us and there is an almost daily lecture on the folly of going out and staring at the planes that are looking for us. It is our almost irresistible sport, for we have little else to do while we are stuck here. There is little traffic movement by day. Despatch riders and war correspondents are almost the only ones who move continually; but occasionally a brigadier will chug in sitting on the back of a motor bicycle, or riding, more grandly, in his jeep.

"Here, in the muddy places, you begin to learn the truth of the old maxim that three-fourths of war is boredom and discomfort, and that only one-quarter is fear. But if it were not for the boredom and the cold, for all the patience and the goodwill that are evidenced here, there would be no



war. The initiative is in our hands at the moment and every tiny move that is made is made to retain it in full measure. For that no sacrifice is too great. Even the army commander, usually with a tommy-gun slung over his shoulder, comes frequently to pay us calls and no man knoweth at what hour he may come. He likes to be challenged so the sentries who know us well by now refuse continually on us. It gives them something to do.

"To-night we move up nearer the battle and this farmhouse will be a memory. But it will be a good one to cherish always."

E. M. has just recalled that in the middle of his dream lecture someone called out: "Why is army petrol so bad?" A most pertinent remark. It is. There seems to be, the men all say, a cupful of water in every four-gallon tin; which is nonsense, but it is very dirty. We all have constant slight trouble with our carburetors.

I went to bed, by stretching my flea bag in the lee of the pigsty wall at dusk and was cold and uncomfortable until midnight, when I got up and went into the Ops. Room to write this.

*November 26.*—Battle for Medjez-el-Bab went on all night and the sky was filled with distant tracers, creeping both up and down, but without any sound at all. It was most odd, as though a small silent volcano was emitting sparks. The 25-pounders made noise, but they were intermittent. The flashes were lovely; and I wish they came from something lovely. We have been held up here, rather longer than we expected; and in my view we shall find these hold-ups more frequent as we get nearer to Tunis. No sign of tanks until just before dawn, when they went by like a mass of leaves blown violently across loose gravel. I meant to get up at midnight and walk on to the ridge, but I was too tired.

Here, as a correspondent, I am on the horns of a dilemma. I am where I ought to be, but my communications are bad; and if I can't get articles home I ought not to be here. First job of a correspondent is to ensure his communications. I shall give it a trial. Here is the only place from which to discover and in which to write the truth. For the man on the spot there is too much sunshine about the official communiqués.

About eleven I took the car out and drove up to the



ridge. The Germans have evacuated Medjez-el-Bab and gone back to Tebourba. Burial parties were at work. A beastly job, the more so as, during the night, Arabs had crept up and stripped the bodies of clothing. Great indignation, but if I were an Arab, I should do the same. Their rags are indescribable.

The more I see of Eveleigh the more I like him. He is a jovial, over-optimistic fellow with a pleasant stutter. But he seems to know his stuff. On one point he is adamant : he won't have any bombing of enemy formations near our own men, lest the latter get bombed. Perfectly correct : nothing is worse for morale than being strafed by our own people. I've seen it happen too often. Burma particularly. The effect is devastating.

There is continual air activity over the road, mostly German, with occasional Spitfire patrols. Maybe we think it's mostly German, because we have then to take cover. A battle over our heads this morning resulted in one Spitfire being shot down. Thank God the pilot did not suffer : he had a bullet through his head. What a waste ! Would his destiny have been selling Hoovers to impoverished housewives ? Or to have served his fellowmen as well in peace as war ? The former I'm afraid.

Two of the new German fighters, F.W. 190's skimmed the field a few yards away this morning. Not twenty feet up. I never saw such speed before. It's too vile and cold in the pigsty ; so we moved up the hill to a farm and borrowed the garage. They loaded the floor with sweet, clean straw, and lent us a little charcoal stove, glowing and warm. We pulled down the shutter, turned on the light, and fried some sausages. Having "borrowed" ("won" is the army word) some mustard, we had a feast. But I do miss bread. There is none here ; and the farmer is grateful for what biscuits we can give his family. The rats were a fearful and noisy pest, all night ; but we shall get used to them. We are three. One makes the early morning tea and washes up, one cooks, and I look after the car. Not that I'm much good at that.

*November 27.*—Hearing that Tebourba had been cleared we drove up this morning. At Medjez, where the Germans blew the bridge the sappers, working all night, mended it so that, if necessary, it will now carry heavy tanks. A splendid



job, and one done to the accompaniment of bombing. They have also cleared away the few mines from the road.

I dislike these drives : the road has perhaps two dozen awful warnings along it : shot up vehicles, burned out. And you can't keep a look-out from my car. You trust to luck. All quiet on the road, and no planes in the sky. The mountains to the north, glowing with the hot sun of morning, fling warmth at us that in some measure compensates for the wind, which is cold. The hills are white and scorch your eyes. There are few trees and no cover.

After the last olive grove we smacked up the hill into Tebourba, and were—luckily—stopped by a British carrier coming out. Tebourba was not free : the enemy had brought up tanks and half-dislodged us. And they were sniping the hill. We went back to the olive grove ; and had lunch with the C.R.E. From the town came great oily plumes of black smoke, almost too heavy to rise. A burning German tank. Certainly not one of our own : we haven't got any here.

A D.R. stopped and said the chaps have had a bellyful, but new soldiers are always like that : when things aren't going well, they think the end of the world has come. The medium guns came out in a few minutes and said the tanks had smashed up the 25-pounders. Our men couldn't smack them : their limbers were in the way. Six-pounders and Bofors went into the town and did some damage to the Germans, who were finally driven out this evening with Grant tanks, sent up from here. The Messerschmitts came and shot up the road, but we got back. Tebourba should be clear by the morning. I shall take a day's rest to-morrow: I am tired.

*November 28.*—Spent most of the day on a haystack, watching the wheat grow : you can almost see the countryside turning green. An air fight with no result this afternoon, and some bombing in the east. Probably the blade force of the 6th Armoured Division, who are roaming freely near Mateur, and irritating the Germans. Warned officially to carry respirators as enemy may use gas. Mine is in Algiers.

*November 29.*—The liaison officer with the brigade in the north had a nasty experience last night. On the road between Tabarka and Beja he was suddenly fired on with a tommy-gun—about 6.30. His machine was hit on the handle-bars, in the tank and the back wheel. He made for the ditch



and fired back, when he saw "something white" flying away to the hills. It may have been an Arab: the Germans have been arming them, and they have looted the magazine at Medjez. Or it may have been one of these Germans who are roaming around dressed up as Arabs. My friend, who is a tough little man, then walked 16 miles to get a lift back here. He was shot at once more on the way.

More Spitfires in the sky to-day. We are still held up, but Eveleigh says he is going to put his armour into Tunis to-morrow. I doubt his ability to do so. British parachutists have been dropped to-day south of Tunis at Depienne, where they are to clean up an airfield. And this evening a number of French fifth columnists, sixth, I mean, have set off for Tunis, where they are to blow up the German command. They look decent boys and I hope they succeed and get out. They have a girl with them. The rats at night are noisier than the planes by day.

After a *vin d'honneur* with our French host, and a listening to the B.B.C. (who say quite improperly that Djedeida is ours) we drove off with the intention of seeing the battle by night. It was moonless and hideously dark. To make matters worse there were American tanks and tank-busters on the road; and they are driven by lunatics. We reached Medjez-el-bab, and gave up the whole thing as a bad job. My car still has peace-time lights, whereas the army's vehicles have some sort of glow. Much aerial activity from time to time. I think the main trouble is that the stars, reflected in the car's bonnet, blinded me. They are so bright, and lovely.

Our host farms 300 hectares here; and is possessed of innumerable poultry of all kinds, cattle, some fine horses, and a variety of modern implements that must represent a considerable capital outlay. He has a refrigerator, two automobiles, is on the telephone, has a large and powerful radio, a family here of wife, two sons and two daughters, and a large collection of Arab servants. His wife does the cooking. And very well, too. She gave us some eggs and milk to-day; and we gave her bully beef, steak pudding and biscuits. They come from Lyons, typical rich, slightly-more-than-peasant stock. The farmer, whose stock phrase is "*trop de faiblesse*," is worried by the difficulty of keeping the Arab servants and hinds in order. Since the fall of France they



have been above themselves, he says. Although the whole family is on our side, they hate de Gaulle, love Pétain, despise the Italians, but respect and fear the Germans. The inner defeatism is there. They want to be left alone to cultivate their garden. This selfish individualism, will the Benns and Inges please note, was one of the causes of the French downfall. Minor, it is true, but a contributory factor none the less. The real rot started with the Dreyfus case, a wound which never healed. My host, incidentally, farms 600 hectares south of here, but he's rented it out now.

Churchill said to-night that we hold Djedeida. This is not true. Military communiqués sometimes remind me of Damon Runyon's description of *Alice in Wonderland*, "a pack of lies but very interesting in spots."

November 30.—We drove up to Tebourba to-day, about 40 miles, saw no aeroplanes. We came round the corner into a deserted little village and found a cheerful company of the East Surreys parked for rest in a wood. And a pretty exiguous wood at that. Wisely they had dug a lot of slit trenches, and we spent the next hour in them. Stukas and German fighters had the air to themselves. It was very depressing to think that the chaps fighting must do so without air cover. They bombed the town heavily and neighbouring farm houses where they imagine we have tanks hidden. A few Bofors pooped off and once a few Spitfires came in for a minute or two and drove the Germans off. But they came back. A few olive trees, very delicate and subdued, stretch from Tebourba to a dull hill that looks like a washed slag heap. From this side of Djedeida the Germans are shelling it in the belief, erroneous as it happens, that our O.P. is there. Beyond the hill there is a switchback range as far as the groves this side of Djedeida, which the troops already call Deedahdedah. When twelve P. 38's, the double-tailed American fighter that looks like a pterodactyl, came nosing up, we drove away, rather depressed by the set-back, due to lack of air support. In my view it would be madness to go for Tunis until we have adequate air cover for our various fighting points. It was a jerky journey home. We started by going up the wrong road and suddenly found ourselves driving gaily into the German positions. Fortunately we were hidden by a mountain spur. We rectified with dignity and speed! Coming home we found that while we were at



Tebourba the Germans had nearly bombed the road. Three very large craters right along the middle of it. While negotiating these a flock of dive bombers wheeled over us ; and I dived for the ditch. They went back and tried once more to smack our concealed armour. Just this side of Divisional H.Q. we ran into an air battle just over our heads. I was happy to get back.

P. R. turned up to-day with three bottles of whisky and two of gin for us. Very welcome. We dined off steak and kidney pudding, beans and hot currant roll. And so to bed, where by a poor light and to the sounds of the rats tuning up, this is being written.

*December 1.*—I forgot to say " rabbits " this morning, but the G.2, a highly competent and lucid officer, remembered, so we ought to have a good month. This is a make and mend day with me. I got the news, which is not good, from the Ops. Room and have been on the farm all day. I wrote a guarded piece this morning but it will probably be massacred by the censor, as A.F. H.Q. are still on the optimistic tack and see things quite differently.

The position is intolerable. Among instructions to the censors is one that says we may write nothing liable to embarrass our governments. This is pure Gestapoism and an outrage. Nor may we criticise. Another outrage. If we had any collective guts we'd all refuse to write a word until the censorship here is brought into line with that on other fronts. But, of course, we haven't.

This is the position to-day. The Germans are in Djedeida. They brought up tanks last night and 88 mm. guns and did a bit of damage. Eveleigh has rightly decided not to try and make progress until he has adequate air cover. This is due up to-day, but I've seen little or no sign of it yet. It is now 4.30 p.m. The Germans are in Mateur in force. They have sewn minefields south of the town and have a concentration outside the mines. We have not enough vehicles to make a frontal attack, so the brigade in the north is to advance on Mateur. This is easier said than done. They have been stopped in a gorge by heavy cross-fire from well-concealed gorges in the mountains flanking the road. Commandos and a battalion of the Royal West Kents, less one company, have been sent round, north and south of the road, to clean these nests up. It is an irony that the R.W.K. s succeeded, with



heavy casualties, and the Commandos failed. Maybe that explains it. They did locate the posts, however, and artillery is shelling them to-day.

In the meantime Commandos have landed on the coast north of Mateur and a company of the R.W.K.s has gone through the hills to meet them at the T junction, where the Mateur-Bizerta road is joined by the Tabarka-Bizerta road. They are to hold that junction, thus depriving the enemy on the road of supplies.

We are dropping parachutists on the Le Kef-Tunis secondary road, and their job, which they are doing, is to rase all hell behind the German lines.

In the meantime the armour is roaming about, in theory menacing the Germans at Mateur and both north and south of that. In fact they seem to be doing very little. Our southern flank is ostensibly guarded by the French, but for all the use they are we might as well have the Dionne Quintuplets there. Both lots are about equally well-armed. They are reinforced by reconnaissance units of ours, operating armoured cars.

We have been trying to bomb the bridge north of Ferryville, between Bizerta and Mateur, but so far, without success.

Our armour is massing behind us, and will be ready to move in about four days. At least, it's hoped so. Then, if the supply of Spitfires can be maintained and increased, we ought to clean up. Lack of maintenance and repair crews on forward airfields is now the main trouble.

A colleague who's just come in was shot up between Tebourba and Medjez this morning. The Germans have managed to get men each side of the road. American tanks have gone in to look for them. I imagine there can only be a few, but it is a nuisance, and hampers communications, which by wireless are none too good, owing to the mountains.

Had a sort of bath to-day for the first time. I heated a tin of water and used it where it was most necessary!

How infinitely remote war seems. The ducks are asleep in the yard, men are harrowing a field, and the oxen are drinking at the trough. If it were not for the German fighters, and the smashed church on the hill opposite, we might be in another world. The sky is lovely: washed and just filling with the first iridescent clouds of evening. The



birds are going to bed in the eaves ; and supper is on the fire.

I now know where the flies go in the winter-time. They go to Tunisia.

The cheerfulness and good nature of the British soldier in the most trying of conditions is now so much a commonplace that it is no longer noticed. I want to notice it here, with moved admiration. They have endured much in the way of hideous discomfort, but they are as full of goodwill and kindness as if they were enjoying a holiday at Blackpool and wanted to share their good fortune. Even the highly critical American soldiers are vocal in their liking, which is about the highest tribute imaginable. They have good words to say about our officers also. The Americans in this war are a wiser and better, yes, and more tolerant lot than those in the last war : they are willing to learn from those who have something to teach. They have a lot to learn.

At supper to-night we discussed which is the world's best short story. I plumped for *Love of Women*, and found instant agreement from Montague, who says his father (C.E.) always thought that. The others chose a Kipling, too. It is queer that with those streaks of vulgarity and sadism, he should have been so great. One of us here, in peace-time in close touch with the Palace, says Kipling wrote George V's first and best broadcast.

*December 2.*—The Germans are counter-attacking hard at Tebourba to-day, and have come in from the N.E. with 45 tanks, all of which, it seems, are newly brought from Europe. This doesn't square up with what the optimistic Eveleigh told me the other day : that out of their total force of 60 tanks, the Germans have lost 45 ! They do not, as the earlier tanks did, bear desert markings. U.S. tanks sent in to meet them got badly mauled. And as the infantry have been dive-bombed almost uninterruptedly they are not feeling at their best. The situation is nasty ; but it should be rectified in a few days if it doesn't deteriorate. " We are holding Tebourba strongly," I was told this evening. I wonder. Without any question we have run up against a great deal more than we anticipated, and we haven't got enough air support. Not nearly. The Germans in Crete improvised five airfields in six days. We haven't improvised one. We are operating from something like 80 miles behind the lines ; and it simply isn't good enough. We have out-



stripped the air on land, and, before we are ready, have bumped into stuff we're not fit to deal with. This means great wastage which we can ill afford. The Germans may not have many tricks in their hands, but they are throwing none away. There is an air of uncertainty up here at advanced H.Q., and staff officers, half laughingly, but only half, are wondering if we are going to be surrounded. It is not comfortable here. That is to-night's atmosphere: it will probably be better in the morning. How rapidly atmosphere changes.

Got up early and drove 50 miles into Souk el Arba to deliver my copy to the aerodrome. That is the measure of the competence of our communications. And not a pleasant drive either, for you have to keep your eyes open. We were only forced to stop twice, but were not shot up. Saw a familiar and much loved figure in the square at Souk el Arba, and would have recognised him a mile off. My old conducting officer from France in a typical attitude. His chauffeur was standing in front of him holding a mug; and he, the Spy cartoon of a cavalry officer, was pouring gin from one bottle and vermouth from another into its wide mouth. It was a great and cheering pleasure; and in spite of the rain I was glad to see him and drink his health.

Saw another old friend who was also, as I was, a friend of Robert Byron, whose death is one of the serious losses of the war. Seeing him reminded me of these two stories R. told, which should be remembered. R. claimed, with that faint smile that promised something apocryphal, that he once arrived in Peking on Good Friday; and that no car having been sent from the embassy to meet him, he was forced to take a rickshaw. As the embassy came into view R. noticed that the flag was at half-mast. He asked the rickshaw man why; and was told, "Blong, long time ago Sassoon men, they kill white man's number one joss: him still plenty solly."

The other story concerns the late Tsar Nicholas, who soon after his accession, went to Borodino to unveil the great and hideous monument there. On his arrival in the village he was told that there was still living there an old man who as a child, had not only seen Napoleon but had guided his horse across the ford. The Tsar sent for him; and he was brought up, feeble, rheumy eyed and dirty, between two



soldiers. "What did Napoleon look like?" the Tsar asked him. The old man thought for a long time and then said: "He was a very large man with a long grey beard."

Souk el Arba looks very peaceful: they have cleared away the debris of the early bombing; and during the last two nights raiders have dropped nothing but flares. I had hoped for letters from home: they are signalled on the way, two batches of them, but I had to leave without them. Maybe to-morrow.

Called for rations at rear divisional H.Q., but could find no tommy cooker, which means no early tea. They are 1000 short already. Found Randolph Churchill careering about the countryside as though on his way to Palm Beach for a holiday. He was very gay, but looks fat in a battledress.

Met a member of my club. He is now a tough little artillery captain, doing very well indeed. Last time I saw him he was in tails, shaking dry martinis. All this is written in the midst of a fearful argument among my colleagues, British and American, about the lack of air support.

Talking of the cheek, ignorance and vulgarity of average news photographers, Drew Middleton recalls one who, when the present Pope visited New York, said "Come on, Cardinal: let's have a picture with your wife and kids."

It's not only my communications that are bad: the army's are. Either this is a very bad country for wireless or our sets are not powerful enough. Divisional H.Q. is out of touch too long and too often. Anderson came up to-day for a long conference. They can confer until they are blue in the face, but they need more air support before they can really go on. The division, of course, which is by no means complete, is being asked to do too much. It is responsible for a line about 120 miles long, instead of the laid-down 25 miles.

*December 3.*—I have had a hot bath, and this is written in a bed, where I am lying between clean sheets. I have dined off eggs, chicken, wine, brandy. And bread. And pepper. We got up at first light to discover that the Germans were staging a new counter-attack at Tebourba, with three companies of infantry and 17 tanks. The situation is ticklish at the moment, but the 6th Armoured Division is nearly here, and there is no longer any need to ask: "Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see any one coming?" The air, as it



were, is full of blue berets ; and the tanks are less than 50 miles away. Covenanters and Churchills. But they won't be ready by the fourth.

Because communications are still so bad we decided, once more, that we must drive into Souk el Arba with our despatches. And at 9.30 we left. Hating the feeling that we may at any moment be shot up I drove the 50 miles in one hour and five minutes, which is much too fast ! We once more found our old friend. Not having taken our clothes off for something like a fortnight (I have lost all sense of time) we succumbed to his offer of a night in bed. Drove back to Divisional H.Q. just in case the counter-attack had developed sufficiently seriously to compel us to stay. It hadn't, so we collected our washing things, typewriters and few precious remaining cigarettes, and came back. Saw a lot of Beaufighters in the air. They'll surprise the enemy out of his wits one of these fine nights. No mail yet : and we hear that when it does come it will be illegible : they've sent it up in a petrol truck whose contents leaked all over it !

Then, in the early evening, we drove up here : three-quarters of an hour of twisting roads to about 2000 feet, to find, isolated and alone in the purple air of dusk, this vast—or seemingly vast hotel, which is like the hotels of Provence : a Cezanna pink, which is meant to be white, doves and almost, but not quite, oranges wired on to the trees, which I once saw at St. Paul de Var. In the grate a huge fire, and comfortable chairs, and tidy women sewing ; and outside the thick forest, over whose head you can look into infinity. There's a far lake, like a piece of cleared chalk land, and mountains from whose peaks at sunset hour, trembling flames seem to rise into the steel sky. I never enjoyed a bath more ; but I was a little ashamed at the amount of dirt the maid had to scrape away. It has been an evening of pure, innocent happiness, with every moment of it earned.

The lambing season has begun : enchanting creatures with white bodies and coal black heads. If they were not real they would be sickly sentimental Disney drawings. And the crocuses are coming out.

*December 4.*—A long and very tiring day. The Germans have taken Tebourba ; and this evening the situation is nasty ; and from the political point of view temporarily



disastrous. Everything will be rectified, but on the short-term view we are in a mess. It is too early yet to launch into detailed criticism, for on the information available there seems little doubt that the strategic situation was correctly summed up. The trouble is that the information was wrong. As a result a number of highly useful units have bumped up against formations stronger than themselves and have been wasted. There has been a constant dissipation of strength, due, maybe to a too rigid adherence to the original plan, but, in my view, to Eveleigh's over-optimism. As a result of the wrong tactics being imposed by the necessity of adhering to the plan, we are very short of infantry. We have had heavy casualties at Tebourba from dive-bombing and the morale of some units has been so shaken that they had to be removed from the line. To hold where we are, east of Medjez we have had to bring a battalion (the Argylls) from a brigade in the north, themselves hard pressed as it is. The Germans so heavily bombed the retreat road yesterday that we lost a lot of guns. I don't mean many, but what is "a lot" for us here. Our correct job now is to wait until the armour is massed.

Drove to Ain Draham early this morning to buy bread and wine, as a present for the 6th Armoured Division, whose general, Charles Keighley, invited us to lunch, and then back, if it isn't an Irishism, towards the front. We stopped in an isolated little valley, and drank wine with a brigadier too young to have been in the last war. He was an impressive and intelligent young man, who almost made me feel old. It was very hot in the valley, and the camouflage net in front of the veranda split the sun's rays and multiplied them.

We found the general—younger, I think, than the brigadier, in a farmhouse drowned in sun. Other than literally, there are no flies on him. He knows the Germans and their warfare from A to Z, and just before the war did a course with the German Army. No one at home would listen to him, of course, as they wouldn't to Mason MacFarlane; but he didn't complain of this. He struck me as a fine soldier, who takes all things as they come. I think he has a head on him; but I am always, which is a bad thing, ready to receive favourable impressions from new acquaintances. He invited us to attach ourselves to his division, which we shall do.



Then the long drive back to our garage, having first "won" an inner tube from a bombed car. It is the only way to replenish supplies, and we had a disastrous puncture this morning in the middle of a ford. Divisional H.Q. has moved forward, which seems rash. To bed at 8, very tired, but the rats are noisy already and preparing for a night out.

*December 5.*—The rats had a night out. It is very misty this morning and the Germans are dodging about, shooting up the road and bombing it. Divisional H.Q. is in an olive grove, beneath one of whose little trees this is being written. But 5th Corps think it is too far forward and it will move back to-night, even though, I should say, the enemy must by now have located the first resumed position. It has a white villa, surrounded by cypresses, which, oddly, do not seem to do well in this climate. Eucalyptus, a little mimosa, oak, chestnut and a few ilex. That is all I have seen so far.

There is little change, but the Germans are trying to push west along the ridge behind Medjez and Oued Zarga. The Commandos, who landed in the north and cut through the hills to hold the T junction on the Djebel Abiod, Mateur road, have succeeded. They cleared out a German post there and sent a detachment up the road to raid an aerodrome. They report that between noon and 2 p.m. every day, something like twenty transport planes land there with men. No material is brought this way, it seems; but a little petrol.

We abandon our garage to-day, and go back to find billets with the 6th Armoured Division; and with them we shall move up.

This has been a moving day, for I have seen men at the height of their nobility, when they have just emerged from an experience which purged them of everything but that basic dignity which divides us from the animals. This is their story. Last Sunday (Nov. 29) a battalion of the Hampshires sent four complete rifle companies into the line between Tebourba and Djedeida. They came out on Thursday (Dec. 3). So far one officer, 88 other ranks, the padre and the M.O. have reported back. They took over a position in a wood about half-way between Tebourba and Djedeida, with, some 600 yards to the east of it, across the railway, a ridge of high ground on which the Germans were comfortably installed. The Germans spent all Monday



morning and a part of the afternoon plastering the wood with mortar and machine-gun fire; and in the early hours of the afternoon hurled down a particularly heavy barrage, which they followed by a tank attack, the tanks being followed by three companies of infantry. Main weight of the attack was against the east end of the wood, and all there, but one officer and five men were killed. These six heroes attacked through the German tanks, and bayoneted the infantry on their far side. The officer, while leading the charge, was firing a Bren gun from his hip. Before a German tank drove over him and smashed his wounded body, he and his men had wiped out a whole company. I wish I could recall his name: he was about twenty-three. Before he died that fearful death he and his men knocked out two German tanks.

Tuesday opened with an attack by twelve tanks on the left flank of these gallant Hampshires. About six tanks were immediately knocked out by 25-pounders, but the remainder came on and pulped the bodies of those who opposed them. It was here that a dying corporal rose to his knees, grabbed a tommy-gun and several magazines. Then he swivelled round and round, firing, until he died. Led by the colonel, one reserve company attacked the tanks with bayonets, passed them, and went for the infantry. It is absolutely confirmed that at this attack the German infantry behind the tanks, went on their knees and yelled "Kamerad." This sudden attack of ours chased the Germans back as far as Djedeida itself. At the same time the Germans opened fire from the ridge with mortars on our scores of wounded lying on the ground; and one wounded British officer then organised a party to go into this shambles and pull out what wounded they could move.

On Wednesday the Hampshire remnants retired a few hundred yards into the olive groves outside Tebourba, only 300 yards from the Germans, who continually machine-gunned them. At one time on Wednesday night the positions were so close that the Hampshires heard the German order to attack their right flank. The colonel asked for volunteers to go out and meet the attack. Every man alive went out, met and routed it.

The same evening a party of one junior officer, a few N.C.O.s and men found a battery of 25-pounders whose



crews were dead. Although they knew nothing about fusing, and were hardly aware of the difference between a shell and a charge, they loaded the guns under fire ; and knocked out a tank, setting it on fire. On Thursday morning 120 officers and men were left alive. All that day they had only two mortars left, which between them fired 268 rounds in the morning. But the Germans were able to replace losses almost as soon as they were caused. When matters seemed to have reached the end, one company commander with six men left called for volunteers to attack the German held ridge. All seven men were killed in that volunteers' attack which smashed three German machine-gun posts.

The Germans then launched a series of frontal attacks on the British positions, all of which were broken up, most of them by bayonets. The enemy then changed his tactics and sent tanks and three infantry companies to surround our positions. Having succeeded he called on the men to surrender, saying, "Give up : we will treat you well," to which a handful of doomed men, according to the padre, shouted "bollocks."

The C.O. then organised his remaining pioneers, clerks, motor drivers and tradesmen, and ordered "fix bayonets" ; and then he and his adjutant (23 years old : a Lloyds' underwriter) led a new attack. The colonel said, "Walk towards them slowly, and charge, and give it to them when you're close enough." Firing a Bren, the colonel led the attack and the enemy infantry broke. Although wounded in the leg the colonel then formed his men in column of three and shouting, "left, right, left, right" marched the few living into Tebourba where he halted them. Here they were ordered to withdraw, but the men, because they were sure that their colonel did not intend to do so, refused, and marched back to battle. But the colonel stopped them, said that the road was covered with German tanks, and ordered them to take to the hills in twos and threes in order to escape and reform farther back.

Well, that is the outline of as radiant a page in military history as was ever written. What can one say of these men ? I remember Stevenson talking about death, about "life going down with a better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas." Maybe it was better so : all the shadows of the



dole and of shameful and rotting poverty are gone for these gallant men. We say they are imperishable and that their name liveth for evermore ; but who will remember them to-morrow ?

I shall, for I drove to within a couple of kilometres of the battle line this morning and saw the 88 heroes. They would not like that word. They are men who ask "for one night in Glasgow and then I'll go back at the bastards.". Their morale is 100 per cent, their goodness and generosity the same ; and they are sore because they are not allowed to go out into the hills and look for their colonel. They offered me cigarettes and a can of soup, as though it was I who had so suffered and endured. I found no selfishness in them, which is rare. They were under sparse trees, too busy praising their friends and their officers to worry about the enemy fighters overhead. They were decent men, and had dignity.

Coming back we ran into the parachutists who had been dropped at Depienne last Sunday. They have had success. They moved north to Oudna, where they shot up six aircraft on the flying field. Later they were attacked by tanks and armoured cars, and so took to the hills, where the Arabs fed them. A good sign this. They slept by day and marched by night ; and this morning after a march of 80 miles arrived at Medjez. One of their officers had been blinded and was led back all the way. Their "rest" and that of the Hampshires will be to guard the landing ground that has at long last been built there. Drove back to Souk el Arba, with a puncture on the way, willingly and generously mended by Signals in next to no time. And so, in the cloudy dusk, back to the hotel in the mountains. And a bath.

*December 6.*—Very cold up here in the wooded mountains; and the sky at dawn, which has just broken, looks as though it had been washed with ice. Robert Dunnett, the B.B.C. man here—and an admirable character—made a wise remark last night, which sums up the situation. He said, "This isn't the sort of campaign to write news about, but to write a novel about."

I have now motored over 3000 kilometres since I had the car, seventeen days ago (an average of over 100 miles a day), so I gave the car over for maintenance this morning, and then wrote the story of the Hampshires. With the exception of

the introductory paragraph and the end, I tried to write without an adjective, which seemed the best way. I think it came off, but a re-reading this afternoon brings, as re-reading always does, regrets for opportunities missed.

There is no change at the front, but the Germans are preparing to attack again this side of Tebourba. Obviously they want the Medjez ridge again: if they could get that it would be difficult to dislodge them, but I do not agree with the pessimistic A.O.L. at Souk el Arba that, if they did get it "we should be snookered." It would be a bad day if in order to prevent them, we dissipated in dribblets the strength necessary to dislodge them if they did. They are behaving very skilfully and trying to make us waste our limited resources. A Commando unit has raided Tunis aerodrome and been cut to pieces. Perhaps it was worth it: enemy air activity has been appreciably less in the last few days.

X tells me that he first knew this part of the world was in the strategic wind, as it were, when, about a fortnight before we sailed he heard the Bank of England had asked for six bullion trucks from the L.M.S. to take 26 tons of paper money for shipment, and heard also that the money was Bank of Algeria notes printed by us. He wasn't so badly misinformed.

Y said he guessed something was up when biscuit points went up, for he knew that a certain firm had an order for 5,000,000 tins, quickly. Most ration tins and boxes are dated September of this year: I have seen none earlier than July.

Picked up Bernanos' *Les grands Cimetières sous la Lune* to-day, in which I found this, "J'endure même humblement le ridicule de n'avoir encore que barbouillé de l'encre cette face de l'injustice dont l'incessant outrage est le sel de ma vie." Not a bad thing for people who think as I do, to read sometimes.

No sound up here all the late afternoon but the laughter of children.

Given an air mail letter card which is to be home by Christmas. It makes a tangible link.

I left the first part of this diary sealed up at home. That from the day I left until now I now seal up and send back to base for safe-keeping. There is always a chance we might



be captured, and if these pages were found it might prove highly dangerous to men it is our business to cherish and protect.

Just heard (4.50) that the Germans have broken through this side of Tebourba, and are moving along the ridges each side of the road. They are dive-bombing our retreating troops and vehicles are burning all along the road. The American tanks are said to be shot to hell. Ours are moving up, presumably to keep them away from Medjez, but they may be too late. We must be off from here at first light to-morrow. This is the result of dribbling our strength away, and must inevitably compel withdrawal in the north. I suspect the report is an exaggeration, however.

*December 7.*—Met Allfrey, the corps commander, who has character in his face, and common sense. He also has charm and ease of manner. He told us that at last we're going to behave sensibly and withdraw the line to Djebel Abiod and Beja, which, of course, we should never have passed until we were strong enough to go all out. This is excellent news. He has not yet told his generals that such is his sensible plan, but will do so to-day. At last the waste and dissipation will be stopped. We have outrun food and ammunition in front, and must have time to bring up more. And we have little armour there. The Germans are stronger than expected. And, above all, the air force is run beyond its strength ; and admits that it cannot perform the task set it. On the new line they think it will be 50 : 50. All this terrible waste of men and material could have been avoided : hundreds are dead and much is lost because of that initial blunder. I don't understand soldiers : my layman's eye has seen little else but that mistake since I first went and lived at Divisional H.Q. This diary must have made that clear. I remember now Evelcigh saying that he wanted to clean up Tunis before corps started functioning. That was probably the root of the trouble. "By that sin fell the angels." It looks to me as though, once the withdrawal is made we shall sit tight and tuck our tails in for maybe ten days. At present our nose is stuck right out, almost under the shadow of German air bases. To put it bluntly, we've walked into a stone wall. The railway is cut at Souk Ahras : it was bombed three days ago ; and that is holding up the tanks. Once they are up, we shall use them, as the enemy is now using his : to



make rushes behind him and a series of cuts across his line of communications.

I saw six Bisleys escorted by thirty fighters going up this afternoon. They all came back. The other day twelve Bisleys went up alone : not one returned.

*December 8.*—The car is still broken, and it turns out the battery is dead, which means twenty-four hours delay, so we are stuck, in the rain, under thin trees ; and I feel like using soldiers' language. The situation is most confused ; and corps—as this is still a purely divisional war—don't know much. Their latest Sit. Rep. says very little ; and it would seem that almost no contact with the enemy was made all last night. Patrols, which went to the north-east of Djedeida, found no sign of activity, and as far as Chougouï saw only a prisoners' camp and a field hospital. No concentrations of any kind, so that presumably their main body is in Tebourba and in the hills to the south-west of it.

This is a sort of large scale guerrilla war, with no "front" ; and about all that can be said is that, simultaneously with the withdrawal we are trying to organise a front, and thus convert the form of battle. Guerrilla units, both infantry and tanks, will, of course, operate on the open flanks.

The enemy is believed to be using his 10th Tank Division which was in Russia. There it was badly mauled, and has been reforming and refitting in France. It is among his best. The Germans are using a lot of dummy tanks. Several men have asked me to tell them what I know of the Beveridge Report of which, on their wireless they have heard a little. Those who have spoken of it seem to think its acceptance a foregone conclusion, so I have tried to disabuse their minds, mainly by pointing out that the Tories, who now pay them handsome lip service, will fight it tooth and nail, and that every insurance lobby in the House will be working overtime to kill it before it gets too popular. This war will have been worth every sacrifice made if the report could be made the basis of a new Britain. The men know a lot more than they did when this war began ; and they are beginning to learn that there is no need for the grinding poverty from which so many of them came. They eat in one day better meals than they used, some of them, to eat in a week, and they have developed a lot since September, 1939. Their whole standard, taken by and large, is higher : of character,



intelligence, health. You wouldn't know it was the same army. And the junior officers have improved out of all recognition. Naturally, there has been time to train them, and selection methods are better than they were ; but I do not believe that those factors are the sum total. There is—I don't know how to put it exactly—a spiritual development.

A most miserable day, thrown away by lack of transport. We have been sitting in an immobilised car at corps H.Q. waiting to be fetched. We came at 11 and it is now 4.50. I wrote a short piece hinting that withdrawal might be sensible, so as to prepare the people at home for temporary bad news. I am too isolated, in this unreal and uncomfortable but moving world of the army's, to know what the political result of a long hold-up—it may be 30 days—will be, but it might easily prove disastrous. The French, who are defeatist, may not keep their hearts for that long, which will be embarrassing.

A nightmare journey back to the hotel. Very dark, heavy cloud from about 1000 feet upward and, in the last six miles, thirty-six hairpin (or almost) bends, in which we met a long convoy. And, of course, no lights. What makes this worse is that the French use them, on peace-time standards, which can completely blind you for at least a minute. This is probably my last night in a bed for something like ten days. If the car is ready to-morrow I shall go off and join up with the armour. The newly arrived censor, who is a publisher in civil life, and seems a most pleasant youth, offered me a contract to-night for this diary. I will probably never publish it, but use it as a case-book. After the war I want two years in which to write what I intend shall be a spiritual history of men at war—this war. The idea is vague, but its outlines now suddenly become clear in my head, but so far only momentarily.

First Army H.Q. expressed appreciation of our work to-day, saying they got fuller and more accurate and more rapid appreciations of the situation from us than from their own men. So they ought to, for, in the nature of things, some of us know more about war than many soldiers here, and are more competent to judge a situation quickly. The army treat us very well and put all information relative to any given operation at our service.

*December 9.*—Although the battery was promised for nine,



it wasn't until after two that we got away from corps. Then on to this Breughel picture, a place called St. Joseph de Thibar. Set against an almost crimson hillside, and crowning several of its foothills is the monastery, and a gigantic seminary, which is now being used as a hospital, and the extensive farm buildings of the monks. All around, stretching far down into the wide valley, where the earth is black, and up into the clouds, when the mountains are bare limestone, is the monastery domain. To-day, beneath the adulterated sun, the monks are ploughing with teams of fast oxen ; and you can see their red hats and blue smocks far up the mountain sides working at the arts of peace. British heavy tanks are moving through their land and along their well-made roads.

All this countryside of theirs is clean and planted, and there are avenues of lime trees and acacia. Their spacious farmyard, broad as a barracks' square, is clean, too ; as are the hundreds of beasts who live there.

The monks make wine, and less excellent brandy, which burns like methylated spirit.

We have a room in the local hotel, which is better than our garage, but not much better. The only visible servant is a small Arab boy, about ten, I should say, who takes the keenest delight in moving dust from one corner of the room to the other.

It would seem that the plan I outlined on December 8 is to be withdrawn, and something a great deal less drastic substituted. This is a mistake in my view ; and it would not surprise me if we suffered badly again, and once more had to come back to it.

A great storm gathered from nowhere a few minutes ago. deluged the mountain tops and is now drenching me. The countryside has vanished, as though under a series of gauze veils. The world is gone and we are in a dream. Because they in the outer world have suddenly become visible, everything here becomes more real even than it is, and even words seem to have substance.

Dined well : soup, omelette, chicken, and, for the first time since I landed, potatoes. To-morrow to the armour, whose general invites us to go on patrol in his armoured cars. It is an invitation I would have been happier not to have received.



*December 10.*—The most hellish night I ever spent, not excepting air raids on London. This morning my body is one complete blister from thigh to head top; and my mouth is swollen. I have been bitten by an invisible bug; and, never, for some reason, having been bitten before, I feel horribly unclean. There is no Breughel this morning: the clouds are down, lying on the mountain flanks like idly tossed bundles of muslin. But above them is an apocalyptic vision: sun-drenched summits with clouds racing through their dark fissures, as though you might stand on them and gaze down into hell, whose escaping smoke passed through your legs in vertical plumes.

Battery dead again. I felt I could stand this no longer, so, once the car was started, I left the others and drove into Bône to get a new battery. Started from Thibar at 11.30 and arrived at 2.45. Much too fast, considering the 79 hairpin bends, and the climb up to over 2000 feet and then down to the sea. As usual, the army behaved with that kind of unfatiguing generosity which they always show; and I had a new battery, oil, petrol and tyres checked in less than half an hour. And all done with grace and good nature, as though it were a pleasure.

Morris, the hiring and claims man, gave me a bed and a wonderful shower, and, although I'm short of clothes, I threw away everything I took off. I hope to be *degonsté* in the morning.

Bône has been much knocked about, but there have been no raids since three days, when the night fighters shot down six out of six, beating their previous night's record of five out of six! The harbour is full of shipping; and the aerodrome is a sight to behold. Choked with stuff. Several friends were killed, alas, the other night. They went down to the docks to help put out a fire that incendiaries had started, when an H.E. fell among them. Too commonplace to record? Found myself well-known at Ordnance where they're all *N.C.* readers, so I "won" a pair of boots and a mess-tin. That is the only use of even small fame: men are kinder to those they know.

The mess has grown and now has a bar. I was welcomed as an old friend; and the doctor, seeing that I am ill, begged to call on me to-morrow. I was dizzy and deaf: I must be full of poison.



No one here knows what the news is : they are as out of touch as though they had no part in the war ; and that worries them. I gave them what news I could ; and it was like giving a drink to a penniless dipsomaniac. The outskirts of Bône are a sight : supplies have multiplied since I was last here beyond any hopes I ever had. Work has slowed down since the last bombing, however, for labour is short. A big group of pioneers, moved for safety from the dock area to a quarry in the hills, were, by a frightful irony, hit and killed in the safe hideout to which they had marched.

This excellent house, built in galleries round a courtyard, belongs to one who, until the fall of France, was one of the most popular men in Bône, where he has lived all his life, and to whose interest and advancement he had contributed much. He was the owner of a large (for Bône) shop : he is a Jew. Since the passing of the anti-Jewish decrees his shop, which was obviously the pride of his life, has been taken from him. What worries him more than that, however, is the fact that no single one of those who were his friends has done anything either to help or sympathise with him. Not one. He lives here, never now going into the town, with a quiet wife and two charmingly mannered little children, who look small enough to be his grandchildren. This house, with its voluptuous bathrooms and expensive fittings of the Arts Decoratifs '26 period, would have cost something like £8000 in England : he built it for £3000. It is very comfortable but too tubular. "Madame est parisienne," he told me proudly. "Elle a du gout." She may have, but it's time she grew out of it.

*December 11.*—We drove home through a series of smoke screens last night, thrown out against raiders. I had no gas-mask ; and have a sore throat this morning. As a result of my bites, my face feels like a football ; and indeed my mouth and jaw are swollen so that it hurts to move them. It gives me a lecherous and even epicene appearance, which is a direct contradiction of how I feel. I ache all over.

I have a bad attack of urticaria, which I am assured has nothing to do with dirt. No one seems to know the cause. The M.O. gave me three minims of adrenalin in the arm, some alkali tablets ; and a bottle of calamine lotion. I feel better already, although the one thing I haven't been able to do until now (4.15) is go to bed. I am to rest for two



days ; but the truth is, I can't, for without the car the others are stranded. I am cut off alcohol, vinegar, condiments and am to drink all the water I can. And tea. As my hosts have invited me to dinner this evening, it will be difficult not to drink.

Bône has now started a paper for the troops : it is called *The Torch*, and publishes the midday news from London. An admirable idea, particularly if it can be sent well forward with the rations. It won't matter if it's a day or so late.

No news of the war to-day. Why ? Because I am in Bône which supplies the army with much that it needs, but is as remote from the war as the top of Snowdon.

Much to my host's sorrow, and my own, I refused all the good offerings he produced in my honour : vermouth, Batard-Montrachet, an excellent (so I am told) local claret, French burgundy. But I forgot, and ate some salad, and am paying for the vinegar. I had to tick my host off at dinner. While extolling the virtues of freedom, he derided democracy and said that he had never used his vote, as it always produced corruption. I wish we would make the vote compulsory.

The secret session on North Africa makes me wonder more than ever what happened to my criticism of and explanation of Darlan's appointment. I do hope, none the less, that the Labour Party will not allow their hearts to run away with their heads. I don't say that the powers-that-be were averse to Darlan, but whatever they were, they could have done nothing else at the time : they had not the force to rule N. Africa without him. It is said freely here that the U.S. Government bribed him with the promise of 2,000,000 dollars to be paid if he behaves himself. In the light of history it begins to look as though future and more objective historians than we can be may say that, after all, it was better that the French Government did not go to Algeria in 1940 and fight on. Had they done so the Germans would probably have gone through Spain and possessed themselves of it.

Bought a beautiful Swiss watch, very elegant, for £2 5s. I don't need it, but a Stepney is useful.

Overheard two American soldiers to-day : A. "Anyways, Hitler's a genius." B. "If he is, he's a stoopid genius."

Which sums him up. One of them, describing a Junkers 88, called it "a ring-tailed son of a bitch."

*December 12.*—Awakened at 4.30 by bombers. They dropped a lot, much of it too close to our almost glass house ; but did little damage. They smashed our mess to pieces, however ; and killed a corporal. There is an excellent novel to be written called "There were few casualties." In that dismissive phrase, what ironic tragedy is implicit, what a story of changed lives. I had another shot of adrenalin, and then, because I'd promised to get the car back to Thibar, drove there, feeling very shaky ; and determined for once to obey an order—take three days' absolute rest. Got a lift back to the hotel in the hills and here, in front of the fire, I shall sit until Tuesday, writing only a "think" piece, to explain and justify our withdrawal. This continued dissipation is now made inevitable by the necessity of covering our withdrawal ; but it is tragic to have to use the Guards for that, which we are now doing.

I drove back by a short-cut through the hills, through meadow-covered mountain into an enchanted garden. We were in mist, but, remote and sublime, the mountain tops were flooded with sun, so that they shone more softly than the green fields at the roadside. I stopped the car and was happy for ten minutes watching the light change. This is a wonderful country : at moments, hideous, almost physically repulsive, and then, suddenly, after an almost inappreciable shift of cloud, radiant. But seldom beautiful, except in the far distance. There are almost perpetual rainbows.

*December 13.*—From my recuperating cyrie in the mountains, where this morning we are in the clouds, this is what I wrote and sent back for censorship :

"The initial phase for the battle of Tunis is now almost at an end : neither side is yet ready to begin the second, which should prove to be the final phase.

"The first stage could properly be described as a gamble with the petty cash—none the less valuable for that—which has not come off : the second will be a capital investment in what there is every reason to suppose will turn out to be a gilt-edged security.

"No complaint can be made that the initial gamble was undertaken, for the odds in favour of a quick snatch at Tunis



being successful seemed slightly in our favour, despite the fact that French reports of enemy numbers were then considered to be high. Where criticism can properly be levelled is against those who continued the gamble after it was obvious that it was not going to come off. In this way a certain amount of valuable and valiant men and equally valuable material were dissipated when they should properly have been conserved for capital investment purposes later.

“The fact that it is necessary to say this should not in any way weaken either hopes or beliefs that this campaign will end as it was originally planned. It will do so. But the achievement of our objective will take longer than the public were at first led to suppose. I should be surprised if we reached Tunis before the middle of January at the earliest. Before we do so it may well be necessary to withdraw further, for as I have pointed out in earlier despatches the terrain we now occupy somewhat exiguously is not the best from which to launch the heavy assault which will prove necessary before we succeed or to hold while we are massing forces for that assault.

“The strength of the enemy, which like our own, is growing all the time, is now such that any continuation of our original tactics would be a cardinal error. Indeed they have already continued too long, and are now forced on us by necessity: we no longer, for the moment, have any choice in the matter, nor shall we have until we occupy ground that we can hold without wastage either of men or material. By the time these words reach London, we should be safely installed in such positions.

“We may then expect a quiet period during which both sides will be making their preparations—we for attack and the enemy for defence. We have been in North Africa so short a time that we have so far not been able to bring up supplies for any serious assault by a force worthy of the name of ‘Army.’ That we have been able to do what little we have done since actual contact with the enemy reflects the highest credit on those responsible for supplies, but even if we had the most perfect transport system in the world and were not hampered by enemy aircraft there would still not have been time to collect and dispose of supplies adequate for an attack on the scale that will be necessary. It is still too early to tell the nature of the margin on which our advanced



troops have been working, but when it can finally be disclosed, a lot of people, to put it mildly, will be surprised.

“Such dissipation of strength as I referred to earlier in this message, applies not only to the ground forces. The R.A.F. has also been stretched—at one time almost to the limit. Now that there are strong reinforcements here, there can be no harm in saying this, but even though the position has improved, it is by no means yet perfect. The Germans for one thing can operate from much closer to their well-built bases than we can from our *ad hoc* airfields; and this situation (and consequent waste to ourselves) will continue to work in the enemy's favour so long as we remain in our advanced positions, which, at the moment, there is no point in holding. Withdrawal by the ground forces to holding positions nearer our own air bases would go some way towards equalising the relative air strengths and thus enable us to build up without unnecessary waste that air support we shall need when we eventually attack. True, the present ‘consumption’—if that is not too cynical a word—of aircraft is not so rapid that we cannot keep up with it, but every aircraft and every pilot lost merely postpones the day of attack—thus giving the enemy extra time to prepare and accumulate his defences—and means that we shall have less than we might have when that day comes.

“Such is the situation at the moment; but there is no reason to be depressed by it for ultimate victory here is not for a moment in doubt. It will be delayed, that is all; and no doubt enemy propaganda will make the most of this delay. We here are naturally disappointed that the original gamble did not come off, but the fact that it did not in no way weakens that absolute confidence that no one here talks about because it is as much taken for granted that we can go forward to victory as soon as we are ready to do so as it is taken for granted that the sun rises each morning in the east.”

It correctly sums up the position, and ought to be told at home, but how much the censors will let go I dare not imagine.\* I hear that Algiers is now cabling only 5000

\* It eventually reached London with every scrap of criticism and implied criticism hacked from it, turning it into fulsome, inaccurate and wholly unjustified praise.



words a day for the lot of us. This is worse than useless with some twenty correspondents here.

Trevor, who commands a Commando unit, came in this evening and stayed to dinner. He asked me to write his official narrative of the recent raid on the area north of Mateur. I am delighted to do this, and have promised him 1500 words by to-morrow afternoon. It is a fascinating story. This is what I wrote :

“ Acting under orders to support the advance of an infantry brigade, by turning the enemy's sea flank, cutting his lines of communication and harrying his withdrawal, the Commando embarked in the port of Tabarka on the evening of November 30. The Commando, which consisted of six British and four American troops, embarked a few minutes before dusk beneath the walls of the ancient fortress which used to guard this little place, and at 18.00 hours turned east for its destination.

“ The whole Commando, together with eight donkeys whose function was to carry the mortars, sailed in nine L.C.M.s and four L.C.A.s ; and the naval personnel responsible for landing them acted under the orders of the army. Earlier night reconnaissance by the naval and Commando commander had selected as a landing place a beach some sixty miles east of Tabarka, which was protected by a spur of land from the long eastward roll of the Mediterranean. The northern coast of Tunisia in this sector of land offers few opportunities for quick and successful landing: for the most part the coast is precipitous, with mountains rising almost immediately from the sea. At this time of year the Mediterranean here is seldom calm : even on a windless day the accumulated swell of nine hundred miles of open sea usually beats on the shore with a ferocity that makes any landing such as that contemplated impracticable. For this reason a beach, whose approaches are guarded by a sand bar and whose expanse is to some extent guarded from the perpetual swell by the northward-jutting mass of Dar Sidi el Moudjad, was chosen for the landing, scheduled in the original plan of operations for 01.00 hours on December 1.

“ The journey through the night was accomplished without incident of any kind ; and the beach was sighted soon



after the moon came up. It is one of the first and fundamental principles of all combined operations that material to be landed on an open beach shall be both buoyant and waterproof. On this occasion there were certain objects to which these principles could not apply ; the eight donkeys and the cinema apparatus brought by a sergeant of the Army Film Unit. The latter was immediately submerged and rendered useless, but five of the donkeys managed to swim ashore. Two of these only were in any condition to be made use of, and the other three were returned to the landing craft from which they had come, and thence 'returned to store.' As it turned out the two animals who remained on shore were useless, for the terrain proved to be unsuitable for pack-animals.

"By 03.15 all landings had been made, and the ten troops moved off to their appointed positions. The whole Commando was divided into halves, and the most easterly positions assigned to those five troops who landed in the first wave. Each troop was assigned a map-reference, and within its own area was to operate independently.

"It had been a wet landing, with water rising approximately to just below the armpits of an average-sized man, but it was accomplished with the loss of only one wireless set, through whose outer covering sea-water managed to percolate. All the other sets, eleven of them, were successfully landed, each capable of maintaining communication with both or either of the headquarters attached to each half. No attempt was made to land any set which could maintain communications with the brigade.

"By dawn the whole Commando had advanced some five miles inland, without making any contact with the enemy or with the local inhabitants. Their objectives now lay below them, on the far side of the range : the road junction (5094) where the main route from Bizerta to Mateur round the northern shores of Garaet Achkel is joined by a secondary route which runs westward some two and a half to three miles south of the coast : the road junction five miles to the east of it (5796) at Douar Faoudja ; and the road which runs between them. These they held, the former for three days with a small detachment that required an enemy column of three armoured cars, two tanks, and three lorry loads of infantry to dislodge them, the latter for one



day. After tactical withdrawal from the latter, it was covered from the hills for a further twenty-four hours.

“From now until three days later the Commando not only dominated this area and denied any use of the road to the enemy, but they sent a troop to keep under continuous observation the aerodrome at Sidi Ahmed, about seven miles to the north-east of Douar Faoudja. During those three days the Commando also occupied an area of some 125 square miles, inside which they moved with complete freedom, and were able to destroy any enemy transport attempting to use the road. Those were the immediate tangible factors of the operation, but in addition the Commando forced the enemy to draw on his reserves and to detach what may properly be assumed to have been a substantial force to counter the threat to his flank and rear.

“All this was accomplished in the face of considerable topographical difficulties, none of which could have been suspected from a preliminary study of available maps.

“Near the roads the country is open and easily accessible to tanks, but only in their immediate neighbourhood. Off the road the Commando was able to advance only about two miles in every hour during the hours of daylight, and at half that rate at night. The hills and valleys in the area of operations are covered with tall Mediterranean heather, rising miles at a time to a height of at least seven feet. Higher up the mountains the scrub is lower but the going no less difficult. The easiest method of progression is to imitate the goat and move on hands and knees, for these animals, which roam the hills in profusion, have forced their own tracks through the undergrowth. What tracks for human beings the country does provide are hard to find even on a large-scale map, and normal movement is impossible without the aid of a local guide.

“Trustworthy guides are difficult to find, for there is no fixed local political orientation: some Arabs were extremely friendly to the Commando, some pointed out their positions to the enemy. Some Italians at an outlying farm showed the greatest kindness to our wounded men, and one troop commander reports that he was informed that the Germans had shot three Frenchmen who had given food to our men. The Germans themselves almost certainly disguise some of their men as Arabs; and one German was shot



wearing French uniform, as was one who appeared in the green beret of the Commando and a British gas-cape, and called on Captain Craven's troop to surrender.

"The main enemy position encountered lay a short way back from the road junction, and appeared to be fairly well concealed. Its machine-gun nests were sighted to give good enfilade fire, and it also disposed of some two-pounders on concealed tracks. Fire was withheld until the Commando forces were well within a well-organised network of machine-gun fixed lines.

"This position was most closely approached by two troops, those of Captain Davidson and Captain Pollitt. Both troops reached their approximate positions in the early afternoon and detached parties to form road blocks with heavy stones and whatever else they could find to do the work. On the following afternoon an enemy motor-cycle came down the road, but was allowed to proceed in the hope that it might be leading a convoy. Otherwise there was no movement until late that night when a drunken pilot of the Afrika Korps (who insisted that all New Zealanders cut the throats of their prisoners) came careering down the road on a motor-cycle, and was captured at the bridge just south of the road junction. With perhaps greater veracity he stated that an attack was shortly to be launched from Bizerta.

"On the third afternoon the enemy opened fire from the cover of woods, at a range of about 600 yards, and four armoured cars were reported moving forward to attack. Actually only two were seen, both of them eight-wheeled, both coloured for desert war rather than for a Tunisian campaign in winter. The second of the two troops was attacked from machine-gun nests and shelled from eight-wheeled armoured cars, but they replied with light machine-gun fire and with armour-piercing rifle fire, and the enemy withdrew.

"All the troops attacking the enemy road position came under heavy fire, but throughout the whole operation, from which they eventually withdrew because of the inevitable shortage of rations, the initiative remained in their hands. They were able to come and go at will, and to make and break contact with the enemy whenever it seemed proper to them to do so. For a total casualty list of six officers and 128 other ranks they were able not only to fulfil their



programme and return with valuable information—particularly concerning Sidi Ahmed aerodrome on to which at 11 hours each day twenty large transport planes landed with fighter escort—but to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy.

“They were able to observe that the enemy’s main supply route from Bizerta is along the road from the fork just west of Sidi Ahmed aerodrome southwards through Tindja and the outskirts of Ferryville, for throughout the whole of the operation the enemy was moving his columns solely by this route. One such column, of 100 vehicles with A.F.V. protection and fighter cover was observed by Captain Bradford’s troop during their observation of the aerodrome area, which is continually protected not only by very large ground forces but by A.F.V.s as well.

“Among the casualties was Captain Bradford who led his men to within four miles of the centre of Bizerta itself; and who was killed leading his troop against the enemy. He died giving coherent orders to his remaining officer for the future disposition of his men. Earlier in the day he had lost one of his officers, Lieut. Petty, while his troops, having cut the telephone wires near Bizerta and used them as trip wires, were crossing a piece of open ground in twos and threes. During this move they were fired on by Germans wearing French uniforms. Six or eight of them, who were close enough to Lieut. Petty, threw hand grenades at him and his batman, and both fell. The batman was not killed, for he rose from the ground with his hands up, and pointed down to where Lieut. Petty was lying. This gesture was the signal for the Germans to throw three more grenades at the spot where Lieut. Petty was lying.

Captain Morgan, who commanded the troop on the immediate left of Captain Bradford, was also killed. He too died after giving combat orders to his men to carry on the battle.

“It is some indication of the severity of the fighting during this operation that five officers have been recommended for the M.C., sixteen other ranks for the M.M., and one for the D.C.M.

“The whole operation lasted three days, after which the Commando spent two days withdrawing to a rendezvous down the road to Cap Serrat, during which period they were able to investigate the right flank of the enemy engaged by



one of our brigade. During the whole operation the average ration per man worked out at about one tin of bully, one packet of biscuits—all of which were sodden when the first landing was made—some tea, chocolates and cigarettes. One troop was able to buy a calf from local Arabs which they then butchered and cooked. Others picked up a few eggs and chickens here and there.

“Because of the necessity for travelling light, little ammunition was carried, and much of that was brought back. This does not imply a small casualty roll for the enemy, for each Commando is a highly trained shot, and the minimum effective proportion which he is expected to achieve is 25 per cent of all shots fired.

“Perhaps the main lesson to be derived from this operation, which certainly went according to plan, is that since the use of Combined Operations the sea can no longer be considered a flank. An enterprise such as this, conducted by the navy and the army, both operating under the command of the latter, shows that the function of the Commandos to the navy is that of cavalry: to turn the enemy's flank and harass his rear while the main attack is being put in from behind. In its own small way this operation ‘Bizerta’ should become something of a text-book classic, for it showed beyond any doubt that when the original plan is such that adherence to it is possible, a small force, operating on cavalry lines, can inflict relatively high casualties on the enemy, disorganise his supply routes and withdraw at its own will without itself suffering in anything like the same degree.

“The rendezvous was made the more cheerful by the fact that the first mail from home was waiting there, as well as a supply of airgraph cards which are to be in England before Christmas.”

Trevor, who is certainly not yet thirty, looks like an Elizabethan, with a fine, broad forehead, dark skin and alert brown eyes beneath thick hair. He is, quite naturally, conceited. It would be more just to say that he has so much self-confidence and has so given all he has to his job, that he strikes one as conceited. That he is a good soldier is certain. He talks of soldiering as Saintsbury wrote of wine, with love, reverence, wit and understanding. “A soldier should be a



bachelor-orphan," he says. "A great commander should be super-normal," and explains this as one who always sees the explanation or solution that is too simple for most of us. He illustrated this by quoting his favourite, Wellington, who when asked if he could help solve a problem that was the despair of all—how to get the sparrows out of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park—said at once : "Put a sparrow-hawk in there." "A soldier must completely re-orientate his life as soon as he begins to understand his job ; and must throw away many of his preconceived ideas." He doesn't think a great deal of the Guards, except as close-order troops, but admits that, after doing an attachment with them, he is biased against them. He feels that if you put a guardsman on his own behind a bush, he'd go to sleep, and that one of his own sort of troops would not. He says that if one of his men felt he must go to sleep under a bush, he'd feel in honour bound to come round to that side from which his seniors could observe him ! War is big-game hunting to him, with the game armed. I feel he is more interested in being a good soldier than in promotion, though it is obviously a pleasure to him to be a colonel at so young an age. He stayed late ; and I felt the only affectation about him was when he asked a question to which he knew there was no answer : was there a track through the mountains by which he could walk home ? He had a car outside.

*December 14.*—Some indication of how quiet the front is : three American photographers went up to-day and the army had to fake action scenes so that their day wouldn't be wasted. Spent all day writing, and sitting by the fire. Read Morand's *1900*, with its description of the open wound across France caused by the Dreyfus case. So deep that forty years never healed it. Slick stuff, but interesting to any one who wants to understand the fall of France. It is implicit in almost every line.

Mail arrived. The long awaited letter from home turned out to be a copy of the *Week* ! And not a good one either. Never was so little said in so many words by such a "one."

Bône was bombed to-night. From the terrace of this hotel we could see the flares, some forty miles away. They might have been at the bottom of the garden. The occasion was welcomed by the French guests here as a pretty relief from monotony : they had no thoughts for those who were



suffering beneath "les feus d'artifices," they were so happy to see. If a bomb fell here or near here they might learn their lesson. We have the incredibly rich head of Monoprix here : he has not yet had to forgo any essential of life : war is only a bore to him and an expense he can well afford.

*December 15.*—Back into harness again, and now at Thibar once more, among the oxen and the tanks, the monks and the machine-guns ; and always the splendour of the hills. It is good to be back : I feel rested and, for the first time, really interested in what's happening. There is no change at the front. We have withdrawn to the hills in front of Béja, and have a wedge stuck into Medjez, which the Guards are holding. It runs, approximately, down the road from Oued Zarga and then from the apex in the town, due south. Each of this southward line is a belt of no-man's-land in which neither side seems to be able to discover anything but patrols. It is true that such a withdrawal will enable the enemy to build up his resources more easily, but, in truth, our nibbling at his positions was not making it very much harder for him to do so than it will now be. For us, on the other hand, the advantage is great : we can at last really begin mounting an attack if the weather holds.

It becomes daily more apparent that the Germans mean, at all costs, to retain a bridgehead in Africa. They will almost surely abandon everything up to the Tripoli area at least and try to hold the Bizerta-Tripoli line with suitable area of manœuvre behind it. Thus the Mediterranean will still be, to some, but lesser extent sealed at the bottleneck. I do not attach any importance to the theory held by some of my American colleagues that Hitler will go through Spain and squeeze us. He couldn't do it. But that he means to fight for this highly important strategic bridgehead is certain. But then, so do we !

Certain facts seem to have been established about the enemy force. It is put at 45,000 now, with Nehring in command, and a new man, Broich, under him. There are perhaps two incomplete Italian divisions, including the 10th Bersaglieri. At the moment the enemy probably disposes of about 150 tanks, and is making an attempt to build the number up to about 400, of which, perhaps, he could, if he were successful, put 300 in the field at one time. Regiments and groups seem to have been well identified.



Three American soldiers came up to-day and said how much they admired the British soldier. They praised him to the limits of their indecent but graphic vocabulary ; but one and all regretted that so many " lords and such folk " were officers, even while violently stating that they were good officers, and that their own in their view were " jumped-up farts," and " nothing but brush-salesmen." I hear this admiration on all hands. And since the battle between Tebourba and Medjez I hear it reciprocated. It is most encouraging. " The most intrepid chaps I ever saw," lieutenant in the armoured division said of an American combat team to-day.

An American colleague—now working for a Chicago paper, has the miserable job of finding out the names of all men here from Chicago, as it is " a wonderful circulation builder." What a way to force a good man to report the war. And what a sense of social responsibility in his proprietor. Signallers are brought overseas at the risk of their own and other men's lives that ammunition may be provided for the Chicago newspaper circulation war : it is disgusting.

*December 16.*—F.P.S. (Field Prevarication Squad) has been at it again. The other day the B.B.C. announced, as coming from official sources, that on the previous day air support and cover at the front had been greater than on any day of the campaign. I have just been in to check up on the records : on that day one tactical reconnaissance went up : there was no cover at all !

Still very quiet. The enemy is thickening to the north of Medjez and is uncomfortably quiet. " It makes you think all the harder," the commander of the brigade of Guards said this evening when I saw him. He looks like an untidy schoolmaster, and wears issue boots. Nothing less like the Guards could be imagined. He wears none of the travesties of uniform that his juniors sport.

We drove into Medjez this afternoon, but all was quiet. Brigade lies behind it, in a bougainvillea covered house of some elegance. A farm, and all is very peaceful : haystacks, date palms, pepper trees and the usual American harvesting machines. It is with something of the shock of returning consciousness that you read, stencilled on a notice outside the door, " the enemy can see you."

It was only then that I realised that for the best part of



an hour we had been in full view, particularly along the road coming into Medjez. The Germans, on the north, are stationed on a long range, known as "Long-stop hill," which commands all entry to the town from the west. At present they are leaving traffic alone. Just above Brigade H.Q. the Coldstreams are holding a hill, along whose summit their Sherman tanks (which they like very much) move up and down most of the day. The infantry is on the hill-top. I never saw so quiet a battle ground. Since the Germans attacked them in captured American tanks, Grants, when they were first coming in, they have heard hardly a sound. And no aircraft in the last two days. It's possible these are bogged down, or they may be having maintenance prior to a big attack. Probably the latter.

It was very lovely up there, benign and clear, and very similar to the Basque country—the only other part of the world I know in which grandeur of scenery can be tender. Except, maybe, the view up Innsbruck's main street on a spring evening.

Afterwards we explored to find a road across to the south for use should Medjez fall or the Germans keep its approaches under fire. We found a usable track through the hills which eventually developed into a good road. It may be useful, for they have now made the Thibar-Teboursouk road (which is our direct route to the armour) a one-way road. Tanks and the rain between them have wrecked it. The clouds played strange tricks at dusk, suddenly uncovering the sun as though it were a spotlight, and focusing its rays on sugar-loaf summits of mixed rock. Lime and sandstone; and what looked like basalt. It was like a scene from *Tannhauser*: the forbidding enticements to ultimate remorse. Very cruel crags, some: serrated like a shot jaw. Found the Irish Fusiliers and passed on a message from their old colonel which I have been carrying with me for some time. They live under and merge with the olive trees. Why the Germans don't bomb every cluster of trees they see I cannot think. There are not many in this country, and men can hide nowhere else. Skidded back over the hills.

The French have started pushing through the no-man's-land on the south, towards Pont du Fahs, and have advanced fourteen miles without meeting any opposition. This is very silly of them, and worth nothing except as a gesture, for if



the Germans do attack they will have to retire : if they don't we must somehow fill the gap they've left behind them. But they have sown the place with mines, which is good, although small parties could have done the job equally well.

*December 17.*—Reading Herodotus I found this again, which I had forgotten. Croesus to Cyrus : “ No one is so foolish as to prefer war to peace, in which, instead of sons burying their fathers, fathers bury their sons.” We are more civilised than Croesus. Most gloriously hot : and I eat warm steak and kidney pudding in the sun, followed by fresh dates. Much better than it sounds.

That something is wrong between the army and air force is obvious to a child, and yet we may not say so. If we did, all would be put right in a minute. But our mouths are stopped. On the whole, however, the censorship is much more liberal than we had been led to suppose, although they attempt to make us convey the idea that battles can be fought without casualties. The most exercised “ stop ” is on lack of air support, which is not as bad as it was, and not as we have imagined on policy and strategy.

F. tells me the American base wallahs are intolerable, swaggering about and saying, “ Why the hell don't you take Tunis ? We stormed this, that and the other and now you're held up by a few krauts.” They have a lot to learn.

*December 18.*—Drove out in hot sunshine above the clouds, which lay below us as though seen from an aeroplane, then down into ten miles of fog and so into the sun again. All is still quiet. We have captured some Italians who were withdrawn from the Libyan front on December 2, 7th Bersaglieri, who were a part of the Ariete Division, which is one of Mussolini's pets. This is important, but I don't suppose the censor will pass it. The fronts are getting closer, even though our own is static.

Much air activity to-day on our part. I counted forty-two planes at one time above Souk el Arba. The Americans claim to have blocked Bizerta harbour with bombs this morning. Their claims are apt to be wild. As usual motored something like 100 miles to-day, as usual, to very little purpose. I called on the Flampshires, who have been recommended for two V.C.s, both alas, posthumous. It is thought that if the colonel is living a D.S.O. isn't enough for him, but the V.C. a trifle much. Where is the line drawn?



Heard more rubbish on the B.B.C. to-night, they were quoting an official spokesman who derives his information from A.F.H.Q. They say our line runs north and south through Medjez. This, simply, is not true. Medjez is still the apex of a dangerous salient.

Came across a new form of the oldest kind of warfare, guerrilla, to-day. A bunch of "Robin Hoods" with blackened faces have been going out about fifteen miles into enemy territory and there raising Cain. They are formed with a couple of tanks and armoured cars, a little artillery and bicycles, which they've "scrounged." They tried horses but they're no good. Their favourite trick is to wait until an enemy patrol has passed them, then bob out and mine the road, setting a few booby traps as well. The enemy blow up on the way home. They also shelled Pont du Fahs over open sights and got away without any reply.

Their worst trouble came from Arabs who gave away their positions constantly. I recall again my October, 1940 article urging immediate allied recognition of Arab rights. Even if we had done so French resistance could hardly have been stronger : they had no fight in them.

First letters from home, two, dated Nov. 10 and 14. Very welcome. Also the *Observer*, with the news on the front page for the first time ; and an admirable and dignified statement of faith by Ivor Brown, which I thought impressive. One sentence I thought a trifle ominous. "The *Observer's* policy is to prosecute the war with loyalty to all our allies until complete victory has been won." Is the operative word "until" ? Also the *New Statesman* and *Spectator*, both welcome, despite a disapproval of me in each of them.

Heard an Arab proverb : "The Moroccan is a soldier, the Algerian is a man, the Tunisian is a woman." And a treacherous woman at that. You don't have to be in North Africa for long to realise how true that proverb is.

December 19.—Motored 330 kilometres to-day, and returned to Thibar convinced that something is afoot. It would not surprise me if we were to start an attack in another two days. Stuff is piling up more quickly than I had anticipated, but I do feel we have enough yet to take so big a risk. Politics or no politics it would be a mistake to start an attack until we have enough material and men here



to suffer a reverse and still maintain sufficient strength to regain the initiative. I doubt our possession of this. If then we attack without it we shall once more have frittered away hardly carried treasure.

But I have no reason to suppose that the attack will be launched: I feel it only, after my tour to-day. On the other side, of course, the enemy also is building up his strength, and deploying it in ever thickening waves round the Medjez salient, and it may be that we must attack and take the risk. Every time, of course, that the B.B.C. announces the sinking of Axis-supply ships it means that some more have got in.

I visited the French to-day, far south, on the road from Abd-el-Melek to Pont du Fahs. They—with great élan and enthusiasm—have pushed now to within nine miles of the latter, sowing the road liberally with mines. Most of the advanced patrol work is being done by Spahis. These French are men of spirit: the few unbeaten in heart, who are moved by a desire to sponge away their humiliation. They show something that—I now realise but then because of a violent francophilism never saw—the French lacked in the winter of 1939 (I was in Metz and the Maginot Line three years ago to-day): individual initiative. In those days the French soldier was doing his duty because he had to: now he, here at any rate, is doing it because he wants to. And he is equally doing it as a man and not as a number. He is a good guerrilla here: he never was before. His tail is right up.

But he still goes to war as Napoleon went. High wagons loaded with fodder, mules to draw the guns, and always the smoking "popotte." He differs in that Napoleon had no need of camouflage. But about all these antique symbols of France's one era of military splendour, there is something ponderously irresistible, like a glacier that is slow to move but eventually overwhelms.

The country in the south is very different from these central plains. The valleys are narrow and barren, and the enfolding ridges are high. The French are patrolling the valley that runs north-east and far beyond its end rises the solitary peak that marks the entrance to Tunis. It is iridescent in the late afternoon, and flows dark blue, like a vast lamp that shines alone in an open space. The land is odd here: belts of hard rock some half a mile wide of differing formation



run through the mountain flanks, grey mounds like heaps of powdered slag, fields thick with rich earth, scrub and whipped rock whose stouter layers only have resisted the ferocity of wind and rain. Clouds hang on the tallest crags like plumes of smoke, infinitely more violent than any smoke that I ever saw rise from the craters of volcanoes. It is a fierce country, like all the rest, however, in that it is tender only at a distance. It is covered with fragile snails. Saw a golden beetle at lunch : he had a bright green belly : very lovely : About half an inch long.

*December 20.*—A wholly unreliable liaison officer, speaking out of turn, says "operational orders" were issued last night, which means, probably, that something is due to start to-morrow. Unless the weather holds it up. The roads are almost impassable to-day : mud in waves and lucky to do 15 m.p.h. on a main tarmac highway. More or less immobilised all day, which made a rest, but a very cold one, possible.

Germans bombing near us to-day, but little damage. A bit close to Corps H.Q. Too tired even to listen to Cripps' postscript to-night. All army cars contain a strong appeal to their drivers not to waste petrol. "Every pint counts" and all that sort of perfectly proper advice and information. Splendid. But quite useless. The fool who designed the standard 4-gallon can made it so that it cannot, even with care, be poured without wasting at least one pint. I reckon that by the time this campaign is over we shall have poured on the ground at least one complete shipload of petrol. Not poured on the ground, perhaps, for whenever cars stop to fill up, Arabs with small bottles appear out of the ground and catch as much of the waste as they are able.

Saw a splendid sight to-day. A French break-down lorry towing a broken Citroën whose front wheels were hoisted up in the air. On the back seat of the Citroën, curled up on a bed of straw, and sleeping, was a fat pig.

*December 21.*—Once more to call on the French, as all is still quite here, although with a nod and a wink in the air. This time to Bou Arada, the left French flank. A journey of 207 miles there and back, owing to one-way traffic over the mountains. We stopped at the beginning of a wide plain, at El Aroussa, and put the car under the last trees for twelve miles. It was perhaps lucky we did so, for four Ju. 52's came



suddenly out of the clouds only about 300 feet up ; but they didn't drop anything although the French fired off with their popguns. I think they hit one.

It is a miserable and empty world that the French hold ; and they have little or nothing with which to hold it. The last twelve miles into Bou Arada are a death-trap, as three British officers learned yesterday, if they had time. The German fighters do what they like along it : there is nothing to stop them. And no cover. The colonel of Spahis, a twinkling little party from Sfax with bright blue eyes, like a doll's, says he has yet to see a single British or American aircraft in his area. He may, and so far does control the ground, but the air above belongs exclusively to the enemy, who uses it as a corridor into our back areas, such as Souk el Arba. I saw a lot of enemy aircraft to-day, but we were not attacked. Two Messerschmitts came over near Thibar early this morning to draw the American fire, and succeeded. They now know exactly where the U.S. tanks are hidden.

Down in the French area four came over and shot up the road behind us at their pleasure. Then two more. We are—there is no question of it—unable yet to deal properly with the enemy's air force here. The R.A.F. is run off its feet : it has no forward airfields, and, other than the feeble and now useless effort to create one at Medjez, it has nothing. It operates from sixty miles in the rear, and has nothing to guard the right flank and not enough to do anything properly. I wish we could say so : but we may not. This is fair neither to the pilots, nor the soldiers. Nor to the munition workers.

Bou Arada has all the unexpected charm of an intelligent face at a race meeting. It lies in the middle of an immense plain, stretching beyond Pont du Fahs ; and is full of great trees and running water and cheerful women. In peace-time it must have been a prosperous market place : to-day it is the limit of the French holding. Beyond is a vast extent of no-man's-land in which both sides roam as they please and do very little damage to one another. A German motor cycle patrol came into Bou Arada to-day and shot it up ; then made off. The French do the same at the other end. They captured 27 Italians yesterday near here : men of the 7th Bersaglieri.

The colonel lives in an elegant farm from whose trees



over-ripe olives drip like gouts of dried blood. His "bureau" is a grain loft, where he sits with a typical Vichy major, who seeks to frighten every one with the odd theory that Rommel is not retreating at all, but is rushing his troops back to push us all out of Tunisia. I see the B.B.C. propounds the same theory to-night. I don't believe it. I believe no more than that Tunisia, or rather its northern corner, is more important to them than Tripoli. Whatever the Vichy major says it would take Rommel more time than we would allow him to about face and re-form his army. Let alone get the necessary transport of which he is very short. This major, who is one of rather too many I have met, has acquired the taste for defeat, and savours it. It is written on his face in precisely the same hieroglyphics that are printed on the faces of those who share his views. And they are not pretty to read.

While we were talking of war, two Arabs, with great wooden spades, were shovelling grain into sacks. This contrast between war and peace is manifest every day. Saw thousands of little birds, like wasps, with yellow and black ringed bodies. How much I missed by not being interested in birds, bugs, trees and earth formations when I was a child. Life would have been even more interesting than it is had I done so. A wonderful sunset: the clouds on the mountain tops, no more iridescent than the crags; it looked as though the mountains themselves had burst suddenly into flower and spread their petals on the sky. Across a saffron belt of open sky in which the first star of evening shuddered, a flight of ducks moved like a slow whiplash.

Hear that the French and one squadron of the 16/5 Lancers are to take Pont du Fahs to-morrow. If they succeed they will, according to reports, have cut a lot of men and transport off. These will have only one road back, via Kairouan. And they may be too late. The decision for the main attack was given effect at 2 a.m. this morning. It will probably be the day after to-morrow, if the weather holds. Division (6th) is more hopeful of success than Corps. It is argued that we can receive no more men for some weeks, and that the enemy, on the other hand, is reinforcing all the time. We have several hundred tanks, including the American: the enemy probably has 150 at the outside. We are not as fully informed about enemy plans and dispositions



as we ought to be ; nor are we adequately supported in the air ; but war is a matter of knowing when to take a risk. I do not know enough to judge, but I think we have a good chance of success. The Irish Brigade is up now ; and many losses have been made good.

The Arabs are hostile. The Germans find their best agents among them ; and several have been shot for sniping and for helping German aviators to escape. They bring back cock and bull stories from the German side, obviously primed. All this could have been avoided.

*December 22.*—The attack is scheduled for dawn Thursday, the day after to-morrow. We have a good chance, I think, if the air force is correct when it says that our strength against the enemy's is in the ratio of 8 to 10. If this meant actual operational strength, I should have little fear ; but actual strength is much more like four to ten on account of our lack of forward bases. What the heavy bombers do is outside my knowledge : we never hear of them except from the B.B.C., but if all to-day and to-morrow, without cease, they can bomb the enemy's fighter bases much would be done to equalise. I hear that even though we have been unable as yet to get advanced bases going, the enemy has improvised a number of landing grounds.

On the other hand our tank strength is probably still a secret. They have been concealed with great skill. The camouflage people have been working overtime, but only, to their great annoyance, since we discovered that the enemy were using bogus tanks.

The Pont du Fahs raid is off : bad weather. Our main attack must first of all make for that place. Its fall would cut off a considerable body of enemy and quite an important fraction of material from the defence of Tunis. Once we begin we must be quick : we have not enough to regain initiative once we lose it.

Very cold and damp. I wrote an article called The P.B.I. (Poor Bloody Infantry). They are not only the best soldiers in the world, but they work with little *réclame* in conditions that no specialist, such as a pilot, would endure for a moment. I admire them beyond measure, even though they have, as individuals, all the limitations of the average voter. But they are, in their own bumbling way, thinking about the end of the war. I said this about them : " They are the backbone



of the army : they may not be its eyes or its ears, but they're pretty nearly everything else, including its muscles and no small part of its brain. And, in the end, they are the men who win wars and are forgotten when peace is made." I also wrote, *à propos* their rations, that there is no reason on earth why they should not eat as well when they get home ; and that they are already beginning to realise this. " If they do not feed as well as this after the war they will want to know the reason why. And I think that if they want to know the reason why they will be in a mood to find out. These are not the infantry of the last war : they are men on whom for twenty years the waves of political unrest have broken and who, even though their average individual intelligence is a disgrace to the rich country which underfed and under-educated them, and now conscripts them, know more than their fathers did and have the same innate shrewdness." I think that is very true and needs saying. Incidentally, my experience is that the same could be written about the munition workers.

Learned rather more this evening about Thursday's attack, which, of course, is dependant on the weather.

The Guards will attack at dawn to-morrow, on a limited front to open up the road for the 6th Armoured Division. It will be a small affair and should not disclose the main plan. I am informed at the moment only of the 6th Division's plans, for I shall be attached to them. They will attack in two columns between the Medjez-Tebourba and the Medjez-Massicault-Tunis roads. Their first day's objective is Massicault, after which they will come back along the road to Medjez, clearing it as they go. Other detachments, all being well on either flank, will press ahead for the second phase : the perimeter defences of Tunis. The danger, of course, is the right flank, but the French, in spite of ill-equipment, should be able to hold any attack from the south long enough to enable us to make any dispositions necessary. I go to division to-morrow.

General Browning, who commands an airborne division, came to tea to-day. An alert, intelligent, quick man. I liked and trusted him. He was fuming because he was not allowed to use his division immediately after the initial landing at Algiers. Now, of course, it is too late ; we are interlocked and the enemy is prepared. I am sure he is right. He tells



me that the Brandenburgers, the finest German soldiers of the lot, are in Tunis, and are now a parachute regiment. He can't understand why on earth they haven't been dropped behind our lines to perform the very easy task of cutting our communications. In view of the type of country, the scantiness of troops and the length of our lines, he thinks it worth sacrificing an entire brigade to the job. The Germans do not drop at night, yet ; and that is probably the explanation. He expects such a move, and says it's "good-bye" to most of us if it's made.

He says U.S. parachute casualties have been two : one of our battalions had no less than 450 casualties. Recommended to those who think everything has been done by the Americans. I told him that one of my colleagues had flown with our parachutists, but that his story had never reached London. He has promised to investigate when he goes home, in a few days. He left England last Friday.

This information about the attack is what you might call a number one security secret, known only to a few. All evening American tanks, tank-busters and so on have been roaring past this village. A colleague went out to see what they were and said to the U.S. traffic cop on the corner that he was "glad to see your boys moving." "Yes, sir," said the traffic cop, "they're all going up for the attack day after to-morrow !" In the same tone as he might have remarked on to-night's full moon.

*December 23.*—Anderson is known everywhere, I'm told, as "Sunshine," because he never smiles. He is not popular. Heavy rain, without cease, all day : the battle will surely be postponed. We have been waiting, packed all day, for orders to move off ; and have wasted a lot of time. This is the oddest approach to Christmas I have ever spent, for the date has no meaning.

It is queer, waiting for a battle. I wish it would clear so that we can get it over, but the rain gives one more time to be calm in. I do not to-day care much for the company of my fellows : I would rather be alone. And then, suddenly solitude becomes as acutely and physically painful as the toothache. A very small dose of fellowship cures it. I want to do nothing so much as to begin a book which, after several years' thought, has at last flowered in my mind ; but it will probably die there and be forgotten, for we are at war. I



never felt so remote from it. To-day it is as if it had no part in me, and as if all the work of the last six or seven years had been a terrible waste. I suppose the Ivory Tower is attractive in adverse ratio to the distance you are from it. It is more inviting than ever to-day; and I can actually see it amid flowering irises; and there is a ruined aqueduct behind it, in the hills. How I hate war, but I hate hating this one, for I prayed for it once.

At last I have a change of clothes. My kit, or part of it, which I had to leave in Algiers the day after I landed, has arrived. But none of the things I really want: books, warm clothes, and a bottle of "Cutty Sark."

Later: the attack is off: the weather is too bad for tanks, and the ground which they proposed to move over is already flooded. Unless it clears immediately we may be forced to stand still for at least another month, probably six weeks. In my view, this would be a good thing: it will give us a chance to equalise in air power. I hear, incidentally, that Air H.Q. may be moving up from Algiers to Constantine. It is about time the army and air force got together: Anderson has, it is said freely, for long now been urging Welsh to move up to him so that they can make joint plans. A vital necessity.

It is a pity the attack has had to be called off, for the Guards brilliantly prepared the way for them before dawn this morning. Those in Medjez station, the Coldstreams, moved five miles up the Tebourba road last night, and then stormed a 900-foot hill, Djebel Ahmera, from which the Germans could dominate the plain between the Tebourba and Massicault roads, the terrain up which the armour was to have advanced to-morrow. They took the summit, lost it and retook it (what worlds of human change and sorrow and pride in that sentence) and were relieved before dawn by an American Combat Team who now hold it. The left flank of the armoured advance would thus have been made safe. The Grenadiers pushed across the Mejerda River to Grich el Oued, at the entrance to the plain, and cleared that of Germans. From east of Medjez, they came down on the Massicault road and cleared that. The doors for the tanks were open, but the weather is against them. It is just bad luck, that's all.

*December 24.*—About the abortive attack there is little to



be said except that it was a crowning mercy that it rained yesterday and did not remain fine until to-day. Had it done so the tanks would have gone forward and been completely bogged down, at the mercy of dive-bombers. We might have lost the lot : in any case we should have been forced to waste much infantry to save any of them. It took a carrier five hours last night to get from Medjez to Grich, two and a half miles ! A man walked it in two hours ; and the pack mules, on which supplies are being sent in, are doing the journey in one hour.

The Grenadiers who went into Grich took six Honeys with them. Three got bogged down before the rain really began, and were hauled out this morning after much labour.

The full story of the taking of Djebel Ahmera I heard at the front this morning from the brigade-major, young and very intelligent. It seems that when the U.S. Combat Team relieved the Coldstreams they did not find it possible to occupy the summit but preferred to remain on the lower slopes. The Germans therefore reoccupied their old positions without opposition. The Coldstreams, in the meantime, had marched back seven miles for a well-earned rest and for the first meal since the previous evening. No sooner had they arrived than they were ordered back immediately to repair the position the Americans had failed to occupy. They drank a cup of tea, and then, with the colonel at the head marched back, "just as though it were an exercise," according to one who saw them. They marched up the hill, retook the position and now remain there, with the Americans on the lower slopes of the hill behind them.

The Coldstreams had 75 casualties in all. The Americans 43, all of whom, owing to the failure of the Combat Team's medical unit to arrive, passed through our dressing station ! We are about 500 yards from the Germans now : they are visible to us, but we are not to them. They were being shelled by U.S. artillery when I left.

Operating with the Coldstreams is a battalion of the Algerian Sharpshooters who have earned much praise. They are north of the hill now and trying to come round so as to cut it off.

The Coldstreams took a few German prisoners : "weedy little runts," says the intelligence officer who saw them. He says their morale is bad.



This does not apply to the Germans north-east of Grich. Two Grenadier sergeants went up to the German positions on the first night and lay up for about 24 hours within twenty yards of them. They were much impressed by their bearing.

A drive across bad, soaked country, to find the H.Q. of the 17th Lancers to whom we took Christmas wine and brandy from a friend, which they seemed glad to have. They are living in great discomfort, but this is necessary as concealment is number one priority. It has been brilliantly done: you wouldn't know there was any armour in the country except the old American stuff. Bought ten eggs on the way home. They get scarcer and more expensive every day. We got fifty-two the other day at 2d. each: to-day 2½d.

Communications are not of the best. When I got to 6th Armoured Division H.Q. they had not heard the story of the Djebel Ahmera and Grich battles, so I was able to draw their maps for them. It is good to be useful sometimes. A hellish day: rain, rain, rain and air activity down to a minimum. The whole plan is off, and there are rumours of a sweep across to Gabes. I trust no such folly will be committed. It would be sheer lunacy to use this force as a barrier across Rommel's supply route from Tunis. It came for a different purpose and a more deadly one; and if we now turn Tunis into a sort of German Tobruk we shall look mighty silly which matters politically.

Eisenhower came up to Corps to-day and had lunch with the various commanders; and I don't yet know what decisions were made. Probably will to-morrow, which is Anderson's birthday. Never knew any day less like Christmas Eve. A very phoney and sentimental B.B.C. news about the "dear soldiers at the dear front and the dear flowers growing in dear Egypt." I suppose a lot of people like this sort of thing. It goes very well with Stuart Hibberd's voice, anyway.

*December 25.*—An American War Department envelope arrived up here to-day for a colleague. It had been rubber-stamped "secret: equals British MOST secret"! There also arrived at last the September, 1942 Edition of Press Regulations. So far as I can see from a quick reading of it we should have got no news home yet if we had abided by a



single one of these regulations, so perhaps it's as well that they're not worth the paper they're printed on.

Went up to the front again to see how the Guards were getting on. They are having a bad time and, like so many units before them in this campaign, are being frittered away. Since yesterday the Coldstreams have been thrown off Djebel Ahmera, have retaken it and have been pushed off again. They, strengthened by two companies of the Grenadiers, are now trying to retake it. Why? There is absolutely no point whatever at the moment in throwing away lives for a position that, since the plan for the armour has been called off, we can do without. Since the massacre of the Hampshires the independent Guards brigade is down to two battalions. Now that the Coldstreams have had such heavy casualties—one company has lost all its officers in the last twenty-four hours—it will soon cease to be a brigade. Had it been kept for the big attack which alone will take Tunis, it would have been invaluable. For the fighting men this campaign must be far and away the most uncomfortable outside Russia.

I watched the battle, or what little I could see of it, from a hill near Medjez. Our batteries were firing frequently, but I could not see where the shells were falling. The enemy was doing little shelling, but what there was of it was good. They hit some kind of dump on the railway siding—probably oil, for there was much sustained black smoke. Through the hills came the drumming of heavy machine guns, muffled and then amplified by the folds in the land.

But the summit of the ridge, to which the Germans attach so much importance that they have thrown in a great deal (perhaps all they can spare) to hold what they have retaken, was quiet and harsh, with its serrated ridge of rock shining like teeth in the weak sun. A strange and sad Christmas Day for the men up there. Otherwise the land, beneath its rain-sodden surface, peppered with white rocks, was quiet, as though it might be the surface of the moon: dead fissured, streaming and bleak. The few dripping Arabs were like odd flopping things from an early Wells. One felt very lonely. We had a bully-beef and wine picnic which was made even more pleasant than it would have been by hearing that Darlan had been shot and is dead. Not being an anarchist I am not, as a rule, in favour of individual assassina-



tion, but this has filled me with pleasure. So perish all traitors.

We called in at armoured division H.Q. and drank a glass of wine with the brigadier. All very pleasant and peaceful, and so back over the wet mountains, where I bought forty-two eggs from the Arabs. The hotel was noisy and full of drunks when we returned.

*December 26.*—The battle of Djebel Ahmera is over : we are back, right, left and centre, where we started from. Net result, heavy casualties in the Coldstreams, rather less severe in the Grenadiers. The American Combat Team still too raw for battle. It is really time that we began to tell some part of the truth about the American army, for they are getting our own men down. To say nothing is potentially damaging to their high and well-deserved reputation. On the other hand the Americans are learning. Several gun posts were left on the hill to shoot it out : we shall not see these brave British soldiers again. May they be happy in Elysium. I wrote a highly critical article saying that this frittering away of good men has gone on too long. The battle should, as was obvious at the time, have been called off on the morning of December 24, when we knew for certain that the tank attack was off. Another source of weakness is the use of mixed forces. The British fight in their own way, so do the Americans and the French, and mixing increases neither confidence nor fighting efficiency. I now put the fall of Tunis at the end of February at the earliest unless we have freak weather.

Got to-day the full story of two brave Grenadier sergeants, Cooper and Roberts, who went out on December 19 (not as we thought on December 23) into the German lines in the hills east of Medjez. Here they built themselves a stone hideout within twenty yards of the enemy and lay there all day, making the map references of all occupied points within a radius of three miles, pin pointing various H.Q.s, and noting the quantity and types of traffic. All day there were sentries near them, one a man wearing the Afrika Korps cap. They came back after twenty-four hours and got within sight five miles of home when they were challenged. Thinking it a friendly challenge, they replied and were shot. Cooper had three bullets in the right forearm and Roberts two in the left shoulder. But they got back and made their



reports before allowing themselves to be dressed. Both have been recommended for the M.M. The expedition was of their own devising.

The car has been out of action for three days. I got a tow of thirty miles, after our local "experts" had given her up. In five minutes the local garage had spotted the trouble : in another five she was going better than ever. Someone had put the distributor in the wrong way round. So simple when you know how, but magic to me.

More of our mail has been torpedoed : this is the third lot. Why must they put all the mail in one ship ?

*December 27.*—Got slightly bombed and shot in Souk-el-Khemis this afternoon when four German fighters came over and tried to get the bridge with small bombs. They need not worry : it won't last much longer anyway. The sappers are preparing to throw another across. The present bridge is one-way and to-day there was a fifty minutes' wait. A target to dream of. We found a way of dodging it by side roads and a ford.

All the news in London is out-of-date : the B.B.C. to-night announce that a battle is being fought for Djebel Ahmera, four days after it began, thirty-six hours after it finished. These remarks are no reflection on the B.B.C. : it publishes what it gets when it gets it.

Came up the mountains for a bath, only to find no water either hot or cold. An untidy day, but one pleasure, and an unexpected one. Ran into John Strachey at Corps who has what the army would think a sinecure. His job is to inspect the department that passes any orders to the R.A.F.

I drove to-day for a long way beneath a flank of mountain, with a lovely plain on the left, thick now with early corn, and as tidy a job of farming as I ever saw. After the bombing it was very pleasant to see all these manifestations of decent human activity going on in the lee of mountains beneath whose crags the Romans camped, at Bulla Regia, while they waited for the men of Carthage to starve. In that same place to-day we, in this second Punic War, are piling up great walls of ammunition, miles and miles of it, one more proof of the miracle that Q. has performed already in this campaign. Everything you could think of, from Bangalore torpedoes and little mines to bombs and fairly big shells. Ten miles of growing corn edged with destruction. Here, for



the first time almost, the near country was friendly and tender and the trees were alive. On the banks wild flag iris is flowering in great abundance: very beautiful with a nostalgic perfume I cannot remember. Proust's famous *madeleines* in tea usually open doors wide, but these only blew a draught beneath it.

*December 28.*—A long drive to the front, with a halt for the usual bully and chocolate in the wood at Oued Zarga where there were a lot of Frenchmen with nothing better to do than cause suffering to a friendly pig. We were entertained by a large praying mantis, who walked on to our joint plate and went through all the copy book motions. A most graceful and charming creature whose wide-eyed innocent look was no guide to the ferocity of its lecherous cannibalism. In Oued Zarga church only two of many statues of saints have been damaged by gun fire. Both are military saints: Michael and Joan of Arc. A fearful headache rather spoiled the excellent fun of the afternoon. We drove beyond Medjez and put the car under a camouflage of branches in the eucalyptus avenue leading to the station. Then walked to Grenadiers' H.Q. where we saw some leavings of the prisoners they made this morning. Twenty-nine and sixteen wounded. Six were killed, including the officer, and one escaped. All fifty-two came blithely down the road in the night, imagining that we had withdrawn from Medjez altogether. They had—they are all 69th Panzer Grenadiers, by the way, with a lot of service in Russia—food and supplies for at least a fortnight. They came most of the way in trucks. They found a damaged Sherman by the road, a few yards from our sentry; and as they started to play about with it, he opened fire. All dived for the ditch and "you could see a packet of bottoms sticking out of the culverts," as the Grenadiers' major said. They were rounded up, with no casualties to ourselves in a few minutes.

They are much better looked-after than our troops. They get a mail every day, and I saw letters dated only four days ago. The men here have had one mail since they landed. Our men are news hungry to the point of famine. The Germans had even provincial papers only ten days old. Ours have none at all. The army post office has never been good; so I wrote a snorter comparing the two. I hope it does some good. If the Germans consider it worth while using mail



planes to the troops we could do the same. It is good for morale, and worth any amount of trouble.

Here is a picture of what the communiqués mean when they say "we engaged in patrol activity during the day." I watched a patrol from beginning to end this afternoon from the roof of the Grenadiers' farm beyond Medjez. We left the car well back and walked forward through the wood until we came to the starting place. The tanks, five Shermans, were all ready to go. In each of them were packed two men, to be dropped, out of sight of the enemy, at the first farm. The Germans were in there last night : if they come back to-night they'll be surprised.

At three the tanks went out. In the very clear air here the farm does not look more than three-quarters of a mile away ; but actually it is 3600 yards. It was a lovely and peaceful scene, and the tanks did nothing to make it seem less so. We saw them drop their cargoes, after moving round to make sure that the house was empty. Then they went off towards the hills where the Germans are encamped—right above our heads. At the next farm they also drew blank, but it took them some time to search every nook and cranny. While they were here the enemy began shelling them. The guns were so far away you couldn't hear them, but you could hear the whine of the shells. Shooting was not good. In three-quarters of an hour's shelling no more than two shells were ever within 100 yards of a tank.

They looked like comical beetles scuttling about. They made a perfunctory round of the woods, set a large flock of white pigeons flying from the trees, dropped another fifteen guardsmen to lie another night and then trailed their coat beneath the German positions. The enemy machine-gunned them, but they might as well have thrown dates at them. After a couple of miles of this the tanks turned and came back to tea. The whole thing had taken one and three-quarter hours. It was fascinating.

The Germans dropped some clever leaflets for the French here to-day : very short and simple. On one side a French soldier, standing on the map of France, kissing his girl friend, and the words : "Which do you prefer : to live with the Germans and go back home . . ." and on the other a dead French soldier, two vultures and a dog, and the words : "or die with the Americans ?"



The other, which was a *laissez-passer*, guaranteeing immediate passage to France, said: "Darlan was assassinated. Thus the English serve those who can no longer be of use to them . . ." and much more in the same vein.

Nobody here believes that Darlan's assassin has been executed. That would indeed be the height of cynicism. Not that we are incapable of rising to it.

*December 29.*—Arab nationalism is becoming something of a problem. The Germans have the leader of "Destour," the organised independence movement in Tunis and are filling him with promises. Sniping is on the increase. I could not resist writing an "I Told You So" article for the paper. I heard for the first time to-day that in the winter of 1939 there was, in fact, an Arab revolt in Kairouan which, owing to a depleted garrison, was put down with difficulty. The leader of the tame independence divide-and-rule movement, "Neo-Destour," is a prisoner of the Germans in Marseilles. But any real hostile movement against us, if it were to develop as it might, would gain its adherents more by promise of loot than anything else. It would be a serious nuisance, for this is the guerrilla's paradise, but hardly a grave deterrent. The Tunisian is a poor creature: syphilis rate is nearly 90 per cent. Typhus is widespread in winter, malaria in summer. I don't suppose one word of my article will get through the censor.\*

The situation has deteriorated a little. The Medjez-Oued Zarga road is covered by snipers who have advanced into the hills; and all men and material are now sent in by night under armoured car escort. The Grenadiers at Medjez station are being mortared and once more the air is the enemy's. We shall almost certainly be back on the hills this side of Medjez (west) in another few days. That, as I have been saying now for weeks is inevitable. The sooner we are back the better. We can afford no more waste.

Of the two dropped patrols I watched yesterday, Harold Nicolson's son, who is the Grenadiers I. officer, says that the first had a quiet night—the Germans did not come back—but the second had a bad time and were mortared most of the night. The enemy must have seen them drop.

At division to-day—it is right back in Béja now—the

\* Not one word did.



G. 2 gave much high praise to the French army, who are doing all possible to help, and doing it with great skill. This is thanks to the senior French officers, most of whom have served all their lives in the colonial army, and are not beaten men. They ask no questions : they do what they are told. These splendid few may prove the foundation on which the new France will rise, but I doubt it : they are non-political in the sense in which an English conservative uses the phrase : a man who will resist socialism with all his might but accept anything else.

Much enemy air activity all day ; and the night is made hideous by what sound like alerts, but are, in fact, no more than the sounding of the sirens at the monastery which call the monks from their beds to prayer.

No plans were made at the Eisenhower lunch the other day, but have been made since. I shall know them to-morrow : we have a conference the other side of the mountain with K, who commands an armoured division.

A padre came in to lunch to-day, and said he was a Fascist when the war broke out and that he almost went to fight for Franco in 1936. He was also sneering about Jews. I asked him how he reconciled that with the Christianity he professes. He had no answer, except to say that he was wrong, but the fellow is a lout and obviously hadn't changed at all. He had the insolence to talk about culture and said that Russia had contributed nothing to the world. When I said, "What about Dostoevsky, Tchekov, Tolstoi to start with," he said, "Ah, but that's different," so I shut up. These sorts of men should have less responsible jobs.

My copy of "The Shropshire Lad" turned up to-day. On the untidy graves of a few Lancers beyond Medjez I would like these words of Housman's written :

"And over the seas we were bidden  
A country to take and to keep ;  
And far with the brave I have ridden,  
And now with the brave I shall sleep."

December 30.—A very cold but lovely, cloudless drive over the range to Testour to see K. at his H.Q. in what must once have been a substantial Roman encampment of a

more or less permanent nature. Perhaps they were not so over-optimistic about Carthage, and decided to make themselves comfortable! It is a great pity that the walls have been so badly rebuilt, for they are of massive incised stone, and had they not been flung together anyhow we might have read another and an older story of human hopes long deferred. The letter face is exquisite.

K. was informative but answered questions with some difficulty and I got the impression that he is going to do things purely for the sake of doing something, which is silly in any walk of life, but peculiarly so in a soldier, and the more so if he is operating in unison with a vastly depleted infantry division.

Other than the plan called off before Christmas because of the rain—he says that only one hour's rain will make the ground here impossible—there was the idea of cracking through to Bizerta, but that owing to the enemy's air superiority, it has been abandoned. They could have flooded the sky with fighters from Sicily and Pantellaria. There is, therefore, in the wind, but he only implied this, a sudden drive through to Sousse or Gabes, in order to cut Rommel's supply line and, if it became another Tobruk as it were, to prevent any possibility of him striking for Constantine, should he be able to hold us in the Tripoli area. I consider this latter idea merely rubbish. The idea, it seems, but K. did not say this, is that the Americans should do this job, if indeed it is ever ordered. I should be surprised if it were, for it would be far more costly to supply than Tobruk ever was. Submarines based on Sfax and aircraft on Pantellaria would be able to effect a powerful offensive blockade.

In the meantime, the armoured division has taken over Medjez from 78th Division and now commands all the troops in that area including the Independent Guards Brigade. The division regrets this, for their rôle now is a defensive one, which is unsuited for armour. K. proposes to play this rôle offensively and in the next day or two proposes several "reconnaissances in force." He will mass what artillery he can in the Medjez area and send out about a dozen tanks—Valentines probably—to draw as much enemy fire and force as much disclosure as possible. He will lose some tanks, and although opposed to losing tanks in



what he calls "penny packets" he thinks it worth doing. "It is good for the Boche to have the tanks go out and make faces at him."

I asked him what was the purpose of such reconnaissance and the sustaining of loss we are hardly able to afford if we cannot follow up with an attack designed to serve a strategic purpose. He said that he would force the enemy to disclose his strength. I cannot see the purpose of this, for unless an attack is put in quickly, the enemy can change his dispositions, and alter the whole picture. It was useless to pursue the subject at a public meeting, but I am haunted by our weakness.

We have a tough job to defend Medjez. It is the key without which we cannot ever open the gates of Tunis, for it is perhaps the most important road junction in the country. The Germans do not need to occupy it: all they need do is deny us the use of it, and they are moving through the hills to that end. We, from our hills on the west and south, can equally deny them the use of the town; but the difference is that they don't need to use it and we do. There will be a tough fight even now to regain complete and absolute control of this area, which almost imperceptibly we have lost in the last few days.

A rifle brigade patrol, sent out towards Pont du Fahs, has had bad luck. They heard of a farm visited regularly by half a dozen big German armoured cars, and determined to get them. They mined three of the four entrances to the farm, and beneath that normally used by the Germans, buried a charge. A man was left to blow it as soon as the Germans were in. They then rounded up all the Arabs on the farm and locked them in a room. Alas, they missed one; and when the motor-bicycle outrider of the armoured cars came up and halted exactly above the head of our concealed man, this Arab came out and gave the game away. The motor-bicycle turned and scooted, followed by the armoured cars. The Arab has been shot. To add insult to injury the patrol was chased home by the very cars it so nearly destroyed.

Two telegrams from London, sent off seven days ago. Four days slower than letters for the German soldiers! The W.O. apologia, broadcast to-day, merely repeats what I wrote on December 13; and almost word for word. It



would have been more reassuring and sensible had it been issued earlier.

*December 31.*—Ordnance, at Bulla Regia, was able to supply us this afternoon, with the following and without any trouble: four outer tubes for the car, four sparking plugs, a torch, six pairs of socks. You just sign for them, and the general impression is that the day of reckoning will never come. This open-air Harrods is a marvel of organisation: I could have got almost anything from safety pins to a new body for a truck. I also "won" (which is an army method of saying "procured from sources better not revealed") an almost complete set of tools for the car.

John Strachey came over for dinner, but we didn't see the New Year in. We were all too tired. Inevitably we discussed the future of Germany; and John said to an American present, "You surely don't want a Carthaginian peace, do you?" Our American friend with great slowness but solemnity said, "I don't recollect that we've ever had much trouble from the Carthaginians since." Which delighted me.

Down in the Tebessa area, where the bomber force is being built up, the Germans are beginning to use glider-borne troops as guerrillas. Two days ago they sent over two gliders at night which were released on an admirably selected piece of land. To distract attention the enemy then dropped a few bombs in the neighbourhood while the glider troops blew a bridge of some importance. They then, it is thought, destroyed their gliders and made off. On the second occasion, the raid was not so well planned. Two gliders were again released; but their occupants succeeded only in destroying a minor culvert. Some friendly Arabs saw them hiding in a farm, and the lot were rounded up, gliders intact.

American troops are beginning to crowd into the Tebessa-Thélepte area, so it looks as though the drive to the coast has been decided on. My instinct tells me it is a mistake, but I don't know the country, the "D day" nor where the 8th Army will be on that day, so there's no more to be said at the moment.

So far, I learn to-day, there have been four "D days" for the attack on Tunis, and all have been put off. Evidence also comes that the premature bulletin about our having taken Djedeida was Anderson's fault. No doubt it could be



traced through the divisional commander down to the office cat, but Anderson's report to A.F.H.Q. did say that we were in Djedeida and that all resistance would be over in forty-eight hours, and the responsibility for (a) a misleading but true picture of the position, and (b) over-optimism must be the army commander's, and primarily, of course, the C.-in-C.'s. My published prophecy of eleven months ago that the Russians would have beaten the Germans by to-day was wrong. But not, I feel, by a great deal.

1943

*January 1.*—Started the New Year by writing for the *News Chronicle* the fiftieth article I have written since landing in Algiers. Too much? I said in it that we here, with the 1st Army, are so completely isolated from the world and even from our immediate neighbourhood that we haven't the faintest idea what our bomber force in N. Africa is doing. I said that it is high time the men were told something of what is going on. After all, it is their war, this time—only to-day Cripps at the Albert Hall on behalf of the government rubbed this in again—and they have a right to know. Orders would be better understood if those who obeyed them had some kind of picture of what is happening. The quite obvious air superiority which the enemy maintains above the battle area would be easier to bear if the men who have to bear it knew what the R.A.F. and the 12th U.S. Air Force were doing. The general impression among the men at the moment is that the air people are doing nothing. I say again that the troops are news hungry to the point of famine. One day, unless this hunger is satisfied, it will begin to affect morale.

I drove to-day over the new bridge at Souk-el-Khemis. Hitherto the bridge here has been one of the main bottle-necks to the front. It is rickety and single-file; and there have been waits of an hour and a half. In four days the sappers have thrown a new bridge across the Medjerda. They cut roads down to it, shifted thousands of tons of earth and have put up a structure that will take heavy tanks. They have shone as well as any one in this campaign, and at the moment are doing almost everything. They lay mines, clear

them away and set booby traps. They make and mend roads. We are all most deeply in their debt. There is no change in the situation, except that 78th Division has now more or less handed over to the 6th Armoured Division, and is concerned with little more than a brigade on the Djebel-Abiod road.

Every night now we cluster round the radio at 9 p.m., and the number grows each day. Some men walk more than two miles to hear and report back to their fellows what is happening in the world. We crowd into the private parlour of this Thibar inn, where the refrigerator and the radio are in some contrast to the cheap crucifix which hangs above them on the drab wall. It is a room of superstitious emblems. A photograph of Pétain, an old Croix de Guerre, a piece of imitation Negro sculpture, not without a kind of academic voluptuousness about the nostrils, which has elegance, and a bronze statuette of Minerva, playing, for some reason, a harp. All the time a rapid game of vingt-et-un is going on among the other ranks with five franc stakes. The usual glass cabinets, made of cheap wood. And cold: the worst kind of cold because the air is stale, but not warm.

Six days now without rain. Phenomenal. There should be a reconnaissance in force to-morrow if it holds fine. The sky is filled with cold stars to-night.

Constant evidence accumulates that the German infantry is much more heavily armed than our own. The fifty prisoners captured by the Grenadiers the other day carried, in addition to the usual complement of rifles and tommy-guns, six light machine guns, one heavy machine gun and a three-inch mortar. A formidable armament.

*January 2.*—We sent out two strong reconnaissance parties in enemy territory to-day. I watched them from a hillside, between the main batteries and the enemy. It was all quite unreal, and very lovely. Just before lunch I found a seat in a sea of rosemary, in the sun and out of the wind, just below the skyline. Then I adjusted my glasses, orientated the map and ate a delicious picnic, washed down by a bottle of red wine. I didn't have even a vestige of the feeling that I get at bull-fights, for the thought of watching men kill each other from this lovely grandstand that dominated so vast an arena was no more than a quick dream. It seemed impossible that the day could be made so hideous.



There were larks in the sky, and twice a covey of red partridges flew up from somewhere near us on the scented hillside. Just below, this side of the scrub where the light artillery was hidden, Arabs were ploughing, and three children were having a game. Beyond in the open ground where the tanks were to go, and where there would be firing I could see flocks of goats and sheep, and the smoke of domestic fires. Beyond the plain the ground rose again, ten miles away, and beyond that, almost infinitely remote but so clear that you could see its folds, Djebel Zagouan "when we can sit on that, we can go home," E.M. said, and I said, "It's as remote as peace."

About a quarter to three the artillery began a lazy summer's-day sort of barrage in the hope that it would draw the enemy's fire, so that we might spot his positions. There was little answer. Just before three, the tanks came out of the hills below us, and started off. There were fourteen of them, all Valentines. Air cover came at 3.10, preceded by twelve Hurry-bombers who dived with precision on Ksar Tyr, and left their cards. They were so accurately flown that for a minute they looked like a piece of black lace being waved in the sky. Then they darted home, across our feet. The Spitfires stayed up. German flak got one. I was looking for it when I saw a sudden flame that fell to earth, spouting fire downwards. There was a parachute beside it so, with any luck, the pilot is safe. I didn't see him get up. The plane was burned out in two minutes and all that remained was a ring of black smoke in the sky.

Meanwhile the tanks were dancing round every farm in the neighbourhood, trying to draw fire; and failing, until they were on the far side of the plain. Then the Germans opened up, but the shells from the anti-tank guns they were using bounced off them. One was hit by an 88 mm. shell. It went through the turret without bursting. As soon as the enemy opened up the tanks signalled back the position of the batteries, and our 25-pounders silenced them. I could see the tanks firing also. All fourteen came back on schedule. When they roam about just out of earshot they are like prehistoric beasts, for they are articulated in a clumsy, unfinished way that makes one think of the imaginative conceptions of Conan Doyle. When the P.38's are above them, flying like pterodactyls, the illusion is complete.



Man's morality, it sometimes seems, belongs to that troubled and ignorant era of our history.

The second sortie (both were in the Medjez area) was less lucky. Four tanks got bogged down, one to its turret ; and if it rains to-night there will be little chance of rescuing them. Neither drew much gunfire or disclosed much ; and no enemy planes appeared. Either the Boche is being clever and is not prepared to disclose more than is essential, or he has very little here. Probably a bit of both. At any rate it keeps the enemy on his toes, we're told. But I wonder. He knows as well as we do that until the ground is dry and the weather settled, we can do nothing here. It is cheaper for them to let our tanks roam about on harmless old-fashioned errands than to waste ammunition of which they have almost certainly no great surplus. We must wait for real air superiority, too ; and they know that.

We drove home in the dark, over the mountains, where the clouds were gathering. When we left at dusk a thick sheet of mist was coming in fast from the sea, like a steel shutter closing a window for the night.

*January 3.*—A bad attack of cafard, and made no better by a cable from the office asking me for precise evidence of the transmission priority granted to agencies. I am 500 miles from base, and know infinitely less about what is going on there than do the people in London. This complete failure of our offices to understand the difficulties under which we work is a permanent cross that the war correspondent must carry.

Evelyn Montague and I are going to Algiers to-morrow to try and straighten out the mess which Public Relations and the censors between them have managed to make. We might just as well not be here. If I can't get things better organised I shall go home. I hear the censors are cutting our work to ribbons, and for no reason other than the protection of certain men's reputations. I am not here to tolerate that. If men's lives are being wasted, I shall do all I can to get rid of those responsible.

The weather has broken : we are more immobilised than ever. There will be little hope for the tanks : they were not out of the bog by noon.

*January 4.*—We left for Algiers at 9.45, and because of a puncture did not get to Constantine until seven. It was a



glorious ride. In one place, just east of Guelma, it took us nearly one hour to move two miles to and from a house we passed. Something like 30 miles of road were consumed climbing to it and then descending. But from the summit it was repayment for the climb : a Doré illustration, not of the entrance to bliss but of the enticing gateway to damnation. Below us was a narrow valley, with gigantic flanks, and the road itself was choked with isolated mountains whose naked summits were like castles. Mostly the valley was in shadow, but in two places the sun cut down, like a pair of blades slicing the clouds.

In Ain Seynour I saw one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen : a quarter Arab, with a face like a flower that begins to be tired of sunlight. It was edged with sorrow, but its petals, as it were, were still radiant with expected joys.

The valleys of eastern Algeria are bare and cold, ringed with high limestone mountains from which all integument has been brushed with the hard bristles of the wind.

At Constantine much of that generous hospitality which the army so well knows how to dispense. It puts the heart at ease.

*January 5.*—The coldest night I can remember. Constantine is a lovely romantic city, like a Rackham drawing if Rackham had a sense of anything but the phoney-romantic. It is built on the two sides of a precipitous gorge, bridged twice, once by a stone duct and once by a suspension bridge. It is a town with character, and, maybe only because of nostalgic smells is akin to, although utterly unlike, Aix-en-Provence. A kind of minor majesty pervades it. After early breakfast in the mess—eggs, bacon, toast, butter and coffee for 8d.—we set out at 8.50 for Algiers. We arrived here at 4.20, having averaged, including time for lunch and for conversation with friends on the road, one kilometre per minute all day. Much too fast.

Algiers stinks ! It is the sewer of the world. Our French friends are in prison and Harold Macmillan has been duped. He says that he has got seven, of the twelve who have been locked up, freed. He doesn't know that they have been flown away to a secret destination. The place is ruled by Vichy pro-German French. The redeeming feature is the arrival of Virginia Cowles.

It was a lovely drive. Iridescent skies all morning, whose



thin clouds, swept constantly aside like theatre curtains with a part to play, showed us snow-crowned ranges basking in cold sunlight. They ran away, height on height until they were as insubstantial as the clouds themselves. We were in warm valleys at their feet. The corrugated sky was with us all day, its clouds blown to symmetry by a constant wind.

How odd to see elegant women once more. Most of them are of the Vichy pack, and should be hanged on lamp-posts. It is true that Darlan's executioner has been judicially murdered. This is a black and filthy page in our history. It is a signal for every Quisling to rejoice.

*January 6.*—Giraud has gone to Dakar. I am told by "my spies" who seem moderately reliable, that he is to meet de Gaulle there or, more likely, on British territory. If he does he will have some explaining away to do, for it is precisely the de Gaullists whom he has locked up on the unseemly pretext that they wish to assassinate him. The picture here is still very confused, and the only concrete fact is that the local government is, with the exception of Giraud, who is a political baby with monarchist tendencies, almost entirely fifth column.

Darlan was assassinated by a young man called Bonnier de la Chapelle, who the de Gaullists say was an ardent agent of Dastire de la Vigerie, who is an active monarchist. They say the whole thing was planned by the monarchists and that the Comte de Paris, who is now here, was privy to it. He hoped, they say, to throw the blame on the de Gaullists and at the same time to profit by the confusion. I do not believe this. The royalists are political vultures, it is true, but from all I hear from friends of his, de Paris is not the man to connive at this. I think it more probable that the Bergere gang planned the murder because they could not cope any longer with Darlan, and they hoped thereafter to get in Giraud, who is so weak that he will do what he is told, and is frightened of turnips in the hedge.

One thing is certain: the Vichy collaborationist gang are running this country and putting our friends in gaol. Among others arrested after Darlan's murder were the Alexandres, father and son, the very men in whose house General Clarke plotted our coup in North Africa. The Americans have not lifted a finger to free them.

Since our arrival here, the Vichy Gestapo has been as



active as ever. An internal censorship has been instituted by the French, so that they now know who are our friends and who are theirs ! The ban on the showing of American and British films is still unrepealed. The French have not informed the country that Djibouti is now on our side. Flags are still—on “suggestion” being flown at half-mast for Darlan. Nothing is being done to find the arrested de Gaullists : the four police arrested simultaneously, there is reason to believe, were arrested because they have compromising papers about the men who form the local administration. De Gaullists are in hiding, and will see you only at night.

I am told that Peyrouton, who is perhaps the best of the Vichy gang, is on his way here, and may be made Governor-General. This would be an advance, but only deeper into the mud of our dishonour. We have sullied our fair name irredeemably, not only by the appointment of Darlan, which was not, I am rather belatedly convinced, justified by military expediency in a war whose political and military strategies are so closely interwoven that one should not be able to tell where one leaves off and the other begins, but also by the way we have allowed our enemies to profit by his death. We are sowing a horrible seed whose harvest we shall have to reap in the post-war world. The whole of Europe will be affected by this for every Quisling will be trying—and with encouragement—to climb on to our band wagon. How many honest millions have we disheartened in these last days ?

Saw General McClure to-day, with whom I had dined in London before he had anything to do with public relations. We laid before him our proper complaints about censorship and transmission, for any stories of criticism we have made have been so distorted as to make them praise. I felt we might as well have addressed the leavings in a cold tea-pot.

I went to a bagnio to-night. I have, I suppose, as wide an experience as most men of the sordid side of life, but this was a depth of humourless infamy I did not know human beings could plumb. It was not the obscenity that horrified me, but the inelegance and hideous vulgarity of the whole thing, combined with the anxiety of the women who paraded in the bar to give “value for money.” This commercial honesty, so reminiscent of Rotary, was truly shocking. I felt



deeply ashamed of myself. The bawd in charge has a son who, as captain in the army, is fighting gallantly near Pont du Fahs. She is very proud of him. I suppose he loves her.

Here is some more information about the enemy. He has 43,000 combat troops and about 8000 "odds and sods" in the Gabes-Bizerta bridgehead. His Luftwaffe personnel is about 12,000. Despite bombing he is able to supply himself and build up a reserve, for the capacity of his ports is not down by more than 20 per cent. Once Gabes and Sfax and Sousse are in our hands—and the 8th Army are expected on that line in another couple of months—his supply capacity will be so seriously reduced that he will probably have to abandon the offensive-defensive and dig his toes in. I was glad to have it confirmed that only fantasists imagine Rommel could strike at Constantine.

Within a week of the taking of the "utterly destroyed" port of Benghazi, we were passing 2000 tons a day through it.

I have seen my file of censored copy; and my hair has almost gone white. Clever censorship has managed to turn every criticism into praise: balance has been destroyed.

*January 7.*—Although I am going back to the front to-morrow, I feel this is the place for me, for what is happening here is infinitely more important than what is happening at the front. That is a foregone conclusion. Here the future of France itself is being disputed, and, perhaps, as a consequence, that of Europe itself. I sent a telegram to my office, saying I should return here until the attack begins, on the ground that "we are from hour to hour setting unhappy precedents that may affect all post-war Europe," and that "if we let this go by default we shall without protest allow a harvest to ripen whose reaping will be a day of sorrow." I could not say more.

The situation is well summed up in a spoof communiqué pinned on the notice board in the general's conference room. Dated Jan. 7, 1945, it says, "General Goering to-day was appointed head of the new German government. Interviewed on this appointment the commander-in-chief Allied Forces said, 'I know nothing of General Goering's past. All I know is that he has loyally fulfilled every undertaking he has made to us.'" And two more items: the first dated Rome. It says "Signor Farinacci was to-day appointed Italian Prime Minister. Interviewed, he said, 'There is no need to



arrest the former Fascist leaders: the party has been dissolved.' " The second from Helsinki. It says: " Marshal Mannerheim to-day proclaimed his absolute belief in democracy. He added, 'I still have some hundreds of thousands of dossiers to go through, but you must remember that Rome wasn't built in a day.' " They about sum everything up. There is also an official, but no less serious, notice on the board, which sums up Eisenhower's views. It asks us to remember that unless the local government interferes with military efficiency we have no right to interfere with them. The truth is that the pro-Germanism of the local government is already impairing military efficiency, but the "boys" are too naïve to see it. I do not accuse them—except Murphy—of pro-Vichy (which to me seems the same as pro-Fascist) leanings in any conscious form, but they are playing a game whose elements they have not even begun to learn with Europe's foremost sharpers. The profound initial mistake—and the clearest everlasting proof that immorality does not pay—was Darlan's appointment. And of course Murphy's appointment. He is friendly with all the wrong people, to let him off lightly. He supposes that because X has good manners, money, and is a pleasant man over a cocktail, he is therefore on our side. But what M. thinks "our side" I think is the enemy's. He encourages every political gangster in town. There is not a man outside the top gang who is not in despair. Every day that the situation remains unchanged it becomes more difficult to remedy. Not that we are trying to. We are even handing back communications to the control of the French, which will enable more than Chatel to communicate daily with the enemy. That is the result of non-interference, just as it is the result of non-interference to allow the ruling pro-Germans to lock our friends up.

The Algiers A.R.P. wardens are to be armed. God knows why they need it. They are members of Doriot's party. This means that they can stage a massacre of our friends whenever they like.

The French have started keeping dossiers of our staff officers in Algiers.

It is, however, beginning vaguely to dawn on the lower ranks of the high-ups that all is not well. "What would you do?" they ask. There is one answer and one only: force



and the immediate importation here by air of technicians capable of taking over all the key industries : communications, police, transport, etc. If this were done and operated on the lines on which we say we are aiming at, we could lock up all the traitors without a murmur.

The papers are Vichy. All "boxes" contain fascist items. "The King-Emperor has left Sicily and arrived in Rome," says the *Depêche* to-day. "General Franco has received the German ambassador." "The Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris has left for Rome."

Where are the Spanish prisoners? I ask and am told it is no business "of ours." Why are the Jews still subject to persecutory penalties? "It is no business of ours."

No : all this is horrible : every Quisling in Europe must be rubbing his hands.

I wanted to dine in A.F.H.Q. to-night to see what this place is like where sixteen generals each have an individual car park ! The process is easy.

To enter A.F.H.Q. you must have a temporary pass. Neither V.C. nor I had one so we each filled in an official slip saying that we wanted to see the other. Then we went in to dinner. To get out I signed her pass, she signed mine !

I was asked to do a broadcast to America for Columbia, so I went up to the radio—which is in A.F.H.Q.—about midnight to find the French had blown the fuses and the service was off for the night. I do not say this is deliberate, but certainly the French are trying to jam the B.B.C., and after contracting with the U.S. radio chains to broadcast certain items locally, they have broken the contract because they don't like the tone of the talks ! Not a single murmur from on top.

*January 8.*—Drove to Constantine to-day. Exactly the same speed to .4 kil. per hour as the journey the other way. I. men very casually, too casually dropped in to find out what we think about the military and political situations. We told them. They all agree, but say, what can you do? The answer again is "force." We have it on land. Two cruisers in addition would solve the business in an hour. These Vichy crooks have cunning but no courage. And no amount of cunning ever beat firmness of character. It is not too late yet, but it will be soon. We could do the job to-day without spilling a drop of blood.



I am almost persuaded to go home and blow the lid off. I can do nothing here : the censorship is " as tight as a lord."

A most lovely ride in sun all the way, and warm almost to the snow line. I am living in " a transit camp." It was an infants' school. The lavatories are designed for children of three or four : so are the washing ideas. The baths make adequate wash-basins. Bigham, from my own tiny village, dined to-night, and I felt homesick.

*January 9.*—Called this morning on the Chief Signals officer of 1st Army at Anderson's H.Q., mainly to thank him for all the trouble his men have taken, but also to learn something about the work they are all doing. Wherever you go in this country, you see Signals men at work. They brought—and it was amongst the least of their luggage, 1200 miles of overhead wire, so that if necessary they could replace a completely sabotaged communications system adequately for the army. Through 1st Army H.Q. alone something like 1000 messages a day are passing, 30 per cent of them " priority," which is 20 per cent too many.

An elaborate system of checking, which in operation is extremely simple, enables any one to discover where, in the circuit from sender to receiver, there is delay, as apart from technical breakdown. Such delays are being eliminated ; and to-day's sheet at 1200 had only six such items on it. French communications had not been maintained since the Armistice, with the result that east of Constantine, which is the eastern terminal of the underground cable system. Signals have virtually re-wired the telephones. So many faults have developed that practically a pole to pole inspection has been necessary. On one circuit—between Souk el Arba and Le Kef, 400 broken insulators were discovered. All had to be replaced. Signals incidentally brought out quantities of poles with them.

Their test stations—since like every other department—they are working on a shoe-string—are few and far apart ; and because of constant breakdowns in the French system, the men in them are working day and night, sometimes over roadless mountains to detect and cure faults. No breakdown of this nature has yet endured more than six hours. Sabotage has been slight : an occasional wire thrown over wires, to create a temporary short ; but that is all.

The country, which experts said would be bad for wire-

less has proved much better than anticipated. Here and there power-boosters have been placed on mountain tops, but as a rule all has gone smoothly. The French P.T.T. is co-operating with devotion and speed ; and have never failed to help. At H.Q. there is a special set designed to keep in permanent touch with the 8th Army.

Signals do not consider telephone or wireless as more than ancillary aids to communication. They are more concerned about the telegraph.

Signalling is a slower method of communication than I had imagined. It is reckoned that from the moment of despatch until ultimate reception a message in cypher goes at the rate of five letters a minute. Ordinary clear teleprinter message speed is fifteen words a minute.

In H.Q. here there is a telephone switchboard capable of handling 200 calls at a time. It was brought from England. I saw one remarkable manifestation of human ingenuity : a teleprinter both sending and receiving simultaneously over a wire on which, also at the same time, a telephone conversation was going on with Algiers.

Also called on the C.R.E. who explained some of the manifold difficulties of keeping the roads in repair, building bridges and aerodromes, and, in their spare time I suppose, removing mines and setting booby traps. Arab labour is a problem : they won't work near the front and in the rear we have the same problem that I found in West Africa six months ago. They don't want money because they can buy nothing with it. This is partially being solved by dyeing battledresses and selling them to the poor natives who have seen no cloth for three years and are in tattered rags. The R.E.s have done and are doing a magnificent job out here. It is their war, so far. Over a thousand miles they are making it possible to supply the forces by their devoted and often improvised maintenance work.

Why on earth the Germans don't bomb this lovely town I can't imagine. It has four Bofors to defend it and not an aeroplane within call, save for a handful of daylight-only fighters.

Just heard that Eisenhower's telephone directory for his staff has fifty pages ! That helps mightily to sum up the trouble.

I went to see Dawnay, the G.I. Intelligence of the 1st



Army this evening. He is very young for such a job—about thirty-four, I should say, even though he is bald. Quite intelligent and lucid, but not really possessed of enough character for the job, by which I mean he is not a big enough man. We laid our censorship grievances before him, but he quite obviously—although sincerely agreeing with us—cannot solve them. Any one but a really big man would break his skull battering against the wall of A.F.H.Q. stupidity.

I dined to-night with Brigadier Mosley, who is in charge of L. of C. here, and doing an excellent job. His other guest was General Terry Allen.

I sat next to Doolittle, who was U.S. consul in Tangier and, when he landed, in Tunis. He is now Mosley's political adviser. He agrees with every word I have said or written about the political situation in Algiers, and is trying, by letter (which is all he can do) to get it righted. He is of my opinion that a show of force would cure the whole trouble in five minutes. "All we need do is to TELL them." Yet, the stupids won't see it. He has achieved something, however. He and M. between them have imposed a new mayor on Constantine, as the former was a Vichy man, hostile to us. He escaped from Tunis a week after we landed—after a week's preventive detention—by driving through the German lines, pretending to be a French farmer on his way home. He says the enemy captured Soussé with twenty-five men in one truck, and sent ten on to Sfax at once. The ten captured it. Doolittle is an exceptional man, I feel. He looks a trifle like an Esquire fashion plate gone seedy, but there the resemblance ends. He advises me to go to Colomb Béchar to see what the French are doing with the Spanish, Polish and Jewish refugees whom they are compelling to build the Trans-saharien railroad. This, a German imposed task, by the way, they invite loyal Frenchmen financially to support!

G.H.Q. is well but far from sumptuously housed in a large hotel. Its main attraction is the view up the deep gorge on whose two sides the town is built. It is sheer and narrow and ancient homes are perched on every jutting rock. Beneath the bridge, which is built in the form of an arc, are at least five tiers of houses, all sodden and shabby. And as the hill rises so does the quality of the town, until it is



crowned by a great bastion of modern apartment buildings which race across the sky like a raked wall. Very majestic. But a symbol, for on the crumpled shoulders of great poverty riches rise towards the sun. In the gorge, all is dark and even the trees seem to be that peculiar shade of green that holds black in its mixture. The great rocks, at its foot, sharpened by wind and falling rains, are like damaged battleships in the depths of a dry-dock. At evening the whole is mellowed and fused : the white city is no longer white—in the sense that Cezanne never knew that colour—and then the apartment houses are like monuments crowning a field in which, to secure victory over men, nature was suddenly convulsed. But she is tamed now.

*January 10.*—Drove back to Thibar, pursued for nearly half an hour this morning by hundreds of thousands of starlings who seemed to be waiting for the mountain tops to clear before they went south. The air was very soft and warm to-day, and the houses almost luminous. An uneventful drive.

There is trouble because A.F.H.Q. was too optimistic about the little engagement in the north near Mateur. The men—driven from the captured hilltop by superior enemy machine guns—were bitter at the announcement on the B.B.C. that the thing had been a success. It wasn't. We used over sixty 5.5's and fired 1000 shells on to the German hill positions before we attacked. The enemy positions were concreted and designed by one of the Todt experts flown hurriedly over. The parachutists, who are probably our best troops, had much smaller casualties. Twenty-five of them routed eighty Germans who were marching, singing, on their positions, firing tommy-guns. The parachutists started singing, too, but the words were abuse ; and they alone seem to have had some effect. The enemy broke and ran downhill. Once more the heavier armament of the German infantry won them the day. Now—at last—we too are to have heavy machine guns. We learn in time : but only just.

*January 11.*—A Public Relations captain—trained for some years in dealing with the Press—asked a colleague to-day if the *News Chronicle* was a daily or a weekly ! There is no need to say much more about the organisation to which he belongs.

I am convinced that this front is dead, and will not be



revived until the end of March. There may—there certainly will, I think—be a drive on Gabes or Sousse, by an American force acting with the 6th Armoured Division, but it won't amount to much. It is true that it will cut Rommel's supply line, but on the other hand it will relieve Tunis of the necessity of supplying him, and enable those inside the bridgehead to retain supplies and build up a reserve. I hear that the total operating force of the 8th Army at the moment is only two brigades. It will be two months before we can really attack in force if Rommel decides to make a stand. If he can, of course. I have received to-day a vague outline of the forthcoming allied plan. It comes from high enough, and is plausible enough to be set down. 1. The attack on Tunis when the rains have stopped and the ground dried : late March at the earliest. By then we should have the 46th Division, an armoured division and an armoured brigade. 2. Soon after a convoy from England, ostensibly for Bône, say, which, suddenly, will be sent on to Sicily to make a bridgehead there, preparatory to a determined assault on southern Italy. 3. Intensified Russian drive. This is a child's A B C of "What we ought to do next," of course, but there it is.

It recurs to me to-night that Maisky said of this operation: "You and the Americans will only get bogged down in the winter in North Africa." He was right, but need not have been so bitter : at least we are diverting reinforcements that would have gone to Russia.

*January 12.*—Some of our "psychological warfare" boys have gone home, convinced that it is quite impossible to work with their American opposite numbers, known locally as the "pathological warfare" boys.

I hear to-day that the armoured division will not directly assist the American drive on Gabes, but will, within the next few days most probably, make a heavy feint south of Pont du Fahs with the object of drawing as much of the German armour now in the south in that direction. The Americans, it is planned, will then strike through to Gabes. Our attack, conceived to have the appearance of a major threat at Tunis, will suffer the casualties, and the Americans will get the kudos. But that in theory, does not matter except to the individuals : it is to be one step nearer home. Provided that the Americans can do the job.



I heard to-day an American officer explaining—but unconsciously doing so—why the U.S. Army is not and probably cannot ever be so efficient in battle as ours. “The American soldier,” he said, “is not like yours : trained to do exactly what he is told, without question. His nature is such that if he receives an order which seems silly to him, he will find a good reason for not carrying it out.” That is the root of the trouble, and the reason why the Americans lose so many individually fine and gallant men.

This is not the result of “democracy.” The International Brigade had discipline as rigid as that of the Guards. The latter, incidentally, have learned an excellent lesson from the former. They now tell their men the whys and wherefores both before and after a battle, taking them into their confidence. At least the Grenadiers do. An admirable idea. Other regiments please copy.

There is a small battle going on near here, on the Goubellat-Bou Arada road. The Germans crossed it yesterday but have been driven back. We attack them to-morrow, in the hope of dislodging them from one of those road-commanding heights for which both sides are always jockeying. Weather was too bad to-day, for the planned attack, and the tanks’ wireless failed, so it has been postponed. These very small scale battles are costly to both sides, but some consider the cost worth paying. I don’t : we are still far too thinly spread.

Maybe this, for the moment, repulsed German attempt to find and drive a wedge into the join between the French and British means that they are cooking something up. To-night, at dusk, they have been bombing the airfields round here in relays of one Ju. 88 at a time, something they have not tried before. Our flak has been ineffective. They are flying home very low over this place : most unpleasant.

My books—except *Bovary*—turned up at last !

I bet X to-day that we wouldn’t be in Tunis by April 1. I have been too optimistic : the hangover from the gamble weeks was heavier than I thought.

Seeing a field of cut vines to-day I thought it looked as though someone had gone over it, sticking giant cloves in the soil. The latter was like burned sugar.

January 13.—Once more an inexplicable frittering. The attack on the hill took place to-day ; and it failed. It failed



because we attacked with too weak a force, but all we could spare. This constant struggle for the hills from which we can eventually debouch into the bridgehead is all very well, but there is no purpose in continuing it if we are to fail every time. And we shall as long as we scrape thinly spread butter off the bread, as it were, and then suppose that what we can collect in that way will be adequate. We have casualties—not big, it is true, not even proportionately big—but there is no sense in it. We cannot, at the moment, even afford to keep the enemy on his toes.

The hilltop disputed with vigour to-day by the Inniskillings and one squadron of the 17th Lancers we could have taken without trouble three days ago, and could have constructed there some form of defence without much opposition. It was in no-man's-land where our patrols were more active and aggressive than the enemy's. Now, when the Germans are on it, we decide to blow them off, and can't do it. The situation has not so changed that that hilltop is suddenly more important strategically than it was when we could have had it almost for the asking. No, this is one more repetition of the high command's consistent error, combined with the typical amateur's belief that you must always be "doing something." Hitler showed this ancient axiom to be folly in the winter of '39. This stage of the campaign should be our "phoney war."

I have to-day the names of all the arrested de Gaullists. I shall try and publish them. "Won" four new tyres for the car.

A telegram from London asks me to return to Algiers and cover the political situation. It is better, I think, to do this than wait for the Gabes-Sousse show by the Americans, and the armoured division's feint; but I shall sleep on it before deciding.

*January 14.*—I have changed my mind. I must stay up here, for it looks now as though the 6th Armoured Division is to be sacrificed in order to let the Americans go through. And when I say sacrificed I mean sacrificed. The division expects to be wiped out to all intents and purposes. The Germans are to be convinced that its feint is a serious drive on Tunis. This I must cover in order to see that justice is done. If the Americans fail the 6th Armoured Division will be blamed: if they succeed they will get all the kudos. And



I am determined to see, at all costs, that the 6th get a fair deal in the world. At the very best, the story of their sacrifice will be tragic ; and E.M. and I this evening decided that if, when the battle is over, and the blame is wrongly placed, we are not allowed to tell the truth, we will go home and tell it. We feel this way to-night because we shall be surprised if, in spite of the sacrifice, the Americans succeed. They are not yet half trained. This means a delay, unless places are changed, of not more than ten days before I can go to Algiers : it is worth it if I can—as I may have to—save the reputations of fine and splendid men from thoughtless, ignorant but quite unmalicious defamation. I still do not agree with the conception of this operation.

More about A.F.H.Q. staff telephone directory. It has 587 names in it. That, of course, includes only those who have their own lines. A.F.H.Q. is bigger than G.H.Q. Cairo in the worst days.

Is there such a word as " maculate ? " I found it in one of the most pretentious pieces of rubbish I have ever read. An American novel that is as shallow as a hollow-ground blade but so full of words that it was hailed as a masterpiece to the tune of tens of thousands of copies.

The most glorious day : the rocks in the sun looked like cushions, and the folds in the frightful mountains like gentle coombes in Devon shores. The air was warm, and men were more kindly and good tempered. This is an exception : yesterday, I forgot to note there was snow in the air. Crème caramel for dinner.

*January 15.*—Anderson came up to Corps this morning to distribute decorations ; and had a very nervous press conference beforehand, insisting that any one who quoted him would be expelled the country. A sign, of course, that he doesn't know how to handle the Press. He admitted the justice of our criticisms, but added that in the beginning it was so much touch-and-go that it was difficult to blame any one. He left untouched the view that he failed to realise when the touch-and-go period was over.

Anderson was frank about inter-allied weakness and about the lack of experience from which the Americans naturally suffer. He did, however, say this, which is true : that, on the whole, co-operation is much better than we had expected.



Questioned about the superior fire-power of the German infantry, he said that heavy machine guns have now been sent from England; and we shall be in a better position from now on to defend what we gain. This is excellent news, even if belated. The army is too inflexible: it will—like a child—learn only from experience and not from common sense. I have myself gained a poor impression of American staff work. In the early days when, with a little more fire-power we might have got into Tunis, U.S. artillery was sent from Oran in a hurry. It arrived without ammunition. When finally, the shells were sent up, someone had forgotten to send the charges! So the guns were withdrawn. We are, incidentally, better equipped with artillery here than the enemy; but so far guns have achieved little. We have more mortars coming for the infantry: 4.2's, range about 3500 yards, at which they are not very accurate.

A. says the French in Tunis have aided the Germans and are hostile to us. If they had been on our side the campaign would be over.

We are to re-attack the hill south of Goubellat the day after to-morrow. We need it before we can stage the sacrifice of the armoured division. This time the attack is to be in greater force. I hope great enough.

I asked Anderson if he would try and put a stop to A.F.H.Q.'s sunshine stories and instanced a couple of the latest. "You're telling me," he said.

Anderson also said that one of the reasons why we are constantly making attacks on a small scale is because we didn't come here to sit still, which I thought a most unimpressive answer.

For the decoration ceremony the sun shone. The Hampshires, as they have a right to, formed the guard of honour, lining a long avenue of date and orange trees. There was an iron garden table, with four D.S.O.s, thirteen M.C.s, four D.C.M.s and sixteen M.M.s. Anderson told them afterwards that they were all the symbols of their units, for each man could not be decorated. He promised Tunis soon. Among the D.S.O.s was the colonel of the Blade force: the tank force which in the early days made our advance possible by threatening to split the Germans. Eventually dive-bombing more or less reduced it to impotence and it was withdrawn when we solidified our rear



positions. The colonel of the reconnaissance regiment was decorated also. They secured our right flank while we made the last stage of our advance.

There was something oddly moving about the ceremony, for the men who came to be decorated turned away immediately after and drove back to battle, less than twenty miles away. It was not a festive occasion: it was more like a snatched moment for some ritualistic necessity.

A colleague who keeps a diary here tells me that he is so bored with it he has reduced it to essentials. His entry for yesterday was, "Knocked down an Arab woman with the car. Cost: 100 francs." Some of the American soldiers call them "the Arabians." The others refer to them with a long "A." Very ugly this, but done in the best circles. "Aydolph Hitler" is the commonest way of pronouncing his name on the U.S. radio by "the air-conditioned boys," which means the most highly paid commentators.

Toilet paper in this hotel now consists of German leaflets strung up on the wall. It is the best and thinnest paper available. I wish they'd drop some more.

*January 16.*—The hill attack, which was to have been at dawn to-morrow has been postponed until later in the day, probably because of the weather. I can't help being pleased at this, for had it not been called off, it would have meant spending a night in the car.

Thank God someone has seen the wicked folly of the proposed sacrifice by the armoured division; and it has been called off. After an attack on one more height, in addition to that above, it is to be withdrawn for re-formation, and will eventually be the spearhead of the attack on Tunis. If I could become superstitious I would really thank God. The Americans are to do the job of taking Gabes without the help of the armour. They will attack on the 23rd. I shall go down to Tebassa and follow it up unless they start by making a mess of the whole thing. I have no wish to be caught: I flatter myself (with more reason than some) that the Germans do not like me. Unlike some who flatter Hitler in his early days, I have always denounced him and his proposals. A wonderful, convulsive sunset, promising fine weather for to-morrow. The skies here, like the land, are always strange: a mixture of ferocity and mildness. To-night half the sky was covered with hot clinkers, the



other half was made of doves' breasts. And once more the land was purple. On the mountain sides the little houses shone like lamps. It is very cold. A wonderful folding chair, with my name painted on, like a film director's, arrived from Fortnums. Very welcome for there is no comfort here. Also a Balaclava helmet and some paper clips, commodities which I need above all others.

*January 17.*—An abortive day. The battle has been called off for another twenty-four hours, but we did not know this until we had driven 70 kilometres, to El Aroussa, over the mountains, "bucking" the one-way road. El Aroussa is a very different place from when I last saw it. Then it was deserted almost: to-day, with no interference from the air, it is filled with the armoured division men, crowding up to make the next move but one. It was very warm there until five when the temperature fell sharply. Had we stayed, as we intended, we should have been very cold. Now we have to look forward to a night in the open to-morrow.

A soft and gentle sunset to-night, picking out distant lonely trees until after the rest of the world was almost dark. We had a long argument to-night about the duties of a war correspondent. Some maintained that the primary duty is to the paper and that a correspondent ought to think of circulation: I insist that we should not think about such things at all, but should tell what we conceive to be the truth about the war, as best we can, and should not bother to think about those who employ us. Only thus, I have always found, can I do my work as well as I can. But I was in a minority. I feel and always have that we should try to explain the war and that all else is of minor importance. "Human stories," except in rare cases where they themselves act as some explanation, do not interest me in the least on a job like this. Even a small campaign is too vast to be written in terms of individual heroism or endurance. At least, that's my story and I stick to it. It has not let me down so far.

*January 18.*—The Germans attacked our Bou Arada positions at 07.10 this morning: twenty-four hours before we were going to attack them. From our point of view they could hardly have chosen a better moment. They sent two battalions of infantry and twenty-four tanks slap into our artillery's field of fire; and we had—for this little campaign



—a lot of artillery there. It must have been a big surprise for them, unless their intelligence was even better than I suppose it to be. Our own, incidentally, was rotten: the attack came as a complete surprise. We have known, of course, that something was cooking, but hardly more than that. If the enemy had attacked yesterday he would probably have succeeded, for we were then, in the army's perpetual and monotonous sport's language, "just teeing up." To-day we were more or less teed. By 10.00 the artillery—it was a gunner's day—had knocked out probably twelve tanks. It is too early to say. Anyhow the London Irish and the Inniskillings have chased the infantry back to where they started from. And to-night we are shelling the German tank harbour. Altogether a good day.

The enemy had much air support. Fifteen Ju. 88's came over Bou Arada early and opened their bomb doors. They smashed the little town to pieces in the centre. It is a long straggling little place with a charming avenue of trees and a lot of plump smiling girls in it. I hope they are not hurt. Spitfires came and shot down three Ju. 88's. One is still burning this evening. Quite ignorant that the attack had taken place I drove gaily into aerial fingers of it this afternoon, to El Aroussa, prepared to spend the night, and to watch our dawn attack to-morrow. This, of course, is now off; and maybe the battle will be over to-night. Coming into the town I heard a lot of shooting and saw a sudden black plume appear in the sky, larger than the usual ack ack: this was the last Ju. 88 catching fire. The crew were pulped. Then the Messerschmitts and F.W. 190's came along the road, but they didn't molest us. I got in a cutting, however: the local ack ack fire is full of enthusiasm but likely to be low!

We wrote a story, in my case emphasising the nature of the engagement, lest people at home should imagine that the enemy is trying to push us out of N. Africa, which some seem to. These little attacks are for the possession or re-possession of the commanding hills, setting the stage for the final attack and defence which will finish the campaign. The Germans are seeking the join between ourselves and the French, for if they can push us back in the south, we must go back a little in the north and thus give them room to manoeuvre in front of Medjez, which would help them greatly. They are also extending now as hard as they can,



the area of their bridgehead to the south. They began with Tunis, Bizerta, but are now trying to build a wall down as far as Gabes, the sooner to embrace Rommel and the better to protect the original bridgehead, which is what matters to them. The hills over which these battles are now being fought occupy *vis-à-vis* Gabes the same position as those for which we battled in the early days occupy *vis-à-vis* Tunis-Bizerta.

We had a charming supper in El Aroussa, in an Arab hovel, by the light of a dingy hurricane lamp. It was very warm and friendly, and for an instant you could see the good side of war and how it makes men comrades. I was preparing to sleep away from the town—for I expect it may well be bombed to pieces to-night, when a cryptic message came asking me if I would leave the line for about four days "on an important assignment." If so air transport will be available to-morrow from Souk el Arba. I said "yes," and by moonlight motored back over the mountains. The sky was red above Bou Arada, as though the sunset had remained there, even though it was to the east of me. In the west the one bright star of evening brandished its crystal tresses in the sky. It was infinitely moving. Guns were firing at Medjez, and filled the sky with sudden light.

What the assignment is I don't know, but I suspect it may be de Gaulle's arrival. If it is I shall be very angry at being called away.

I cabled home to-day begging editorial support for my fond belief that here in N. Africa we have a tremendous opportunity to grow and store food with which to feed Europe after the war. Two harvests a year : immense tracts of untouched but good arable land : almost unlimited cheap labour, provided we pay with cloth as well as money : short sea voyages after the war increasing day-tonnage over the Atlantic crossing in a way that will go far to compensate for lack of shipping. This is an idea dear to my heart.

Re-reading Stendhal's *Armance* : it is an antidote of the best kind, full of wise and flashing comments on the human heart. But it doesn't work like that to-day, thank God : men are more sensible : so are girls.

January 19.—Churchill and Roosevelt are to meet at Gibraltar : I imagine the day after to-morrow. That is the "important assignment" offered to me. There is some sort



of hold-up about the matter, and the plane was not at Souk-el-Arba when we arrived. I talked to Algiers on the telephone and they have promised to send one to-morrow. They are waiting for a cable from Harry Hopkins to confirm that we may "officially" attend this meeting: if that confirmation does not come, I have arranged for us to fly to Gibraltar and do the best we can. But I shall not feel happy until my feet are once more on the Rock. I shall get a good article out of that anyway: I was last there in the spring of 1939 when the *Leipzig* came in, and we thought it possible the war might begin then.

As I feared: Peyrouton is Governor-General. "A good man," a French friend of his said to me last night. "He drinks a bottle of whisky a day!" Vichy yardstick of quality?

The Germans attacked the French between Robaa and Pont du Fahs this morning and broke through, as they were bound to do with little but spirit to oppose them. They attacked with thirty tanks and are making for the road which is our joint vein. If they cut this and it stays cut the peril of the French will be great, for the difficulties of supplying them will be enormously increased. Already there is if not a shortage at least no surplus of available transport, and the army can only do so many ton-miles a day. We are working on a small margin as it is. This new effort of the enemy's is part of the whole device to build a wall round the Gabes section of the now extended bridgehead. If, on the other hand, it proves successful beyond, I think what they'd hoped, they may think the risk of mopping up the French altogether, one that is fully justified. If they try, the U.S. forces now almost (or should be almost) ready for the Gabes attack may be diverted to save them. That would be wiser than bringing any more of the very thin khaki line down from the north.

Last minute hope: that we may fly to-morrow. I flew 30,000 miles between July '41 and '42 but I have not flown a yard since.

McClure, the American P.R.O., apparently won't believe the evidence of his own eyes. He has sent one of his own men up here to see if the complaints about bad transmission are true!

January 20.—7.30 a.m. A perfect day for flying. All we



need now is an aeroplane. Almost as soon as I woke X asked me who, in my opinion, was the most moral character in literature. I said Hamlet.

11 p.m. This is written in Algiers after the most perfect flight I ever took. We came in a Hudson bomber, converted for communications purposes, which means that the after-turret is removed, leaving five machine guns as defence. We left Souk el Arba at 13.00 and arrived at 15.20. I snatched the navigator's seat in the nose and had an uninterrupted view of the approaching world, right underneath the pilot. This is the best view in the air for you lie in a glass box and can see in all directions. The last time I lay in such a place was eight months ago when I flew with the A.O.C. Burma over the Naga mountains, trying to find Alexander's retreating army that boots and food might be dropped to them. That was a tragic hour, but this, serene and calm, was happier. We cut across the mountains, flying at 3400 feet to the sea just west of Bône, and thence at 500 feet along the coast, just out to sea. So that we might enjoy this tremendous sight the pilot followed the contours of the land with his port wing-tip and we traced out the shape of each bay and inlet as though we were cartographers. It was very warm and benign. Above us towered the snow-crowned ranges, a sort of reminder that everything cannot always have great beauty. There are wrecks in the Bougie roads, but otherwise all was tranquil. I was sorry when we arrived.

I was wrong. R. and C. have met not at Gibraltar but at Casablanca or thereabouts. There is still no word about our going on, but if we are to go it must come quickly, for there seems reason to think the conferences will be over to-morrow evening.

At six I went to a conference given by Peyrouton : a stocky, thin-lipped creature into the pouches under whose eyes I felt you could slip an ounce of tobacco and get away with it. He recited the more savoury aspects of his recent career and explained them away, adding, with a sanctimonious ogle that all he asked really was to be a soldier and fight. There's nothing to stop him so far as I know. A wretched time-server. I asked him if, in view of his protestations, he proposed to use his influence to repeal the anti-Jewish decrees and free political prisoners. He said the matter was not his concern. A colleague asked him if he



proposed to make changes in the administration. He says he has had no time to consider the matter. Liar. Another colleague, inelegantly summed him up as having been "pickled in human excrement for twenty years." "Why flatter him?" was all I could say.

Received a cable asking me to tell the M.O.I. what should be done to improve censorship and communications out here. It is simple. Lay down rules. 1. Nothing to be written that divulges information to the enemy. 2. Nothing that is bad for the morale of the troops, this not to be used as a method of protecting and cloaking inefficiency. All else to go through as written. As for transmission, we need mobile wireless sets run by competent men. The R.A.F. have such a transmitter for the use of their correspondents: the W.O. could easily provide one. If there is not competent personnel available in the army let the N.P.A. get Cable and Wireless Union to hire them five such men and rush them out. It is nonsense to say there is no room on the ships: the first American ship here brought a full brass band! And we don't need any more staff officers! A lively little raid to-night—full moon—with a lot of shooting but no bombs yet.

*January 21.*—We left Algiers in a D.C.3 troop carrying plane at 12.20 and arrived at Casablanca at 5.10. I wish I could recapture the same infinite delight that I used to have in flying so that I could write about it as I did nine years ago when I first flew from India to London. H. M. Tomlinson said then that I had achieved the impossible: made an air journey more interesting than it must have been to experience it. To-day's was one of the most uncomfortable I ever took. After Sidi bel Abbas we ran into storms and were flung about for three hours. We went up to over 9000 feet to escape the clouds but began to ice up, so we flew blind above the mountain tops in tearing rain. A nasty experience. I missed seeing what will always be one of the lovely sights of the world. Fez, green and white in the middle of a brown and arid world. I saw it in 1937 when I flew from Toulouse to Casablanca to begin my investigation into the whereabouts of German guns in Spanish Morocco.\* We came out of the clouds less than 500 feet over the coastal plain, and staggered on to the most crowded aerodrome I

\* See *There is No Return*.



ever saw. Everything from Spitfires to Liberators. Very impressive indeed. The Americans here are most efficient, judging by a very short acquaintance. They have, externally at any rate, the town running in a most orderly fashion. We are billeted in the Excelsior, and had a wonderful dinner. Steak, corn and fried potatoes, all imported : American coffee and marmalade on white bread.

I met old friends here, including Jay Allen, who is working for the O.W.I. and seems to be chief censor. We see C. and R. to-morrow at noon. I fear that a dishonourable bargain has been made and that Franco or a representative has been here. Is Spain to come in on our side, and shall we land there? If I object to this as a piece of cynical immorality from which no good can come I am told, as I was in argument to-night, to be practical ! But it is I who am practical. On an immoral basis you can construct no solid and enduring peace. It is not practical politics to have a military victory in 1943 by calling Fascism to your aid, for such a military victory contains within itself the seeds of a new war. That must by now be obvious even to Beverley Baxter. It is practical politics to postpone that military victory if necessary for another two years by not calling in Fascism, for only in this way can that otherwise third phase of the world war be avoided. We cannot conceivably win the peace if among those at the council table are men who can exist only by conflict or by such preparations for conflict as must result in it.

This is the great lesson of the past ten years. By our conduct of affairs in North Africa, by any satanic bargain with the grotesquely evil Franco, C. and R. between them are turning this into a war against Nazism for the sake not of the possibility of decent conduct but of Fascism. Of the two I prefer Nazism, if one can have a preference between syphilis and gonorrhea ; it is naked, and it is more progressive.

The French in Algeria are demanding the right to censor our copy. That is a new measure of their impudence. I am informed that this right will not be granted them, but I fear a compromise, unless C. and R. have decided to clean the whole area up, which I think to be quite possible. If they do not sweep drastically they had better not sweep at all. Now, it is not too late to kick the Peyroutons and Bergerets



and Rigauds out : soon it will be. If they are not to creep back under other names it will be necessary to remove Murphy.

From someone who was concerned with the preparations for the American landing here, I learn to-night that Nogues would not have ordered resistance had the U.S. consul convinced him that the Americans were coming in force. He expected no more than a raid and was told by his local admiral on the evening of November 7 that there wasn't an allied ship within 1000 miles of the Moroccan coast. Had he realised that we meant business his silly honour could have been satisfied without bloodshed. As X said to-night : "He's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch if only we would make use of him." We don't : we beg and cajole, instead of giving him orders.

*January 22.*—The conference has been postponed until Sunday, with a vague chance that it will be sometime to-morrow. There is an air of great mystery here : naturally ; and the secret seems to have been well kept. Very few people have the faintest idea who are among them. Of all the C.-R. meetings this seems to be the most important, and, if what little gossip there is has any truth in it, it has turned into a regular League of Nations. It is said that a Finnish delegate has been here, and a Turkish. With C. and R. have come, in addition to the usual staffs, Brooke, Dill, Pound. It is difficult to approach within half a mile of the suburb where the two men are staying. There is an outer ring of barbed wire through which you can pass only with a special card ; and then a second, on which are strung hundreds of old tin cans. I have not yet been through that. The whole place is like a kind of garden city.

Some more colleagues arrived to-day by air. They had a horrible passage. Because of bad weather they flew by the sea route, through the Straits and down the coast. The pilot, quite inexcusably, mistook Larache for Port Lyautey and went in to land. He was flying an obviously unarmed Douglas civil plane. Franco's men opened fire when the aircraft was only fifty feet from the ground ; and shot one of my colleagues through the head. He is dead. Then the plane made a dash for the sea, fired at constantly with machine guns. The pilot did a magnificent job and managed to hide in a valley just wide enough for his wingspan, and



down this he took them to the sea. They were all badly shaken.

I went into the docks this afternoon to see the *Jean Bart*, the great almost completed French battleship. She is a sight of terror and beauty. A 1000 lbs. bomb from an American dive-bomber hit her slap on the after deck and blew a hole in the side of her through which you could drive a pair of L.P.T.B. omnibuses. On the forecastle a 16-inch shell from a U.S. battleship had fallen and made the deck and sides into ugly lace. There is a big torpedo hole amidships. She flies the tricolour at the stern and the admiral's flag from the yard which stretches above a superstructure that is like a block of flats. She is yellow. They say that even in her shattered state she can do fifteen knots, which is too fast for any submarine. She is to go to America for repairs as soon as those of a temporary nature are made ; and in a few months should be ready for a more glorious career than she has so far enjoyed. But she will require new guns if she is to be supplied with ammunition.

Michelier, the French admiral, is no friend of ours, but is not without wit. When the Americans asked for the return of one of their 16-inch shells which had not exploded, he declined to return it on the grounds that once you have made a present you cannot ask for it back.

I was shown a photograph to-day of German submarines using Casablanca harbour. It was taken in August last.

El Aroussa was bombed on January 18 before dawn : a bomb fell where an obstinate colleague had prepared to sleep and where, indeed, he would have done had we not left that night for the first stage of our journey here. I wrote a "think piece" to-night. I said that this campaign has now entered the third phase, that in which the operations of the 1st and 8th Army have at last merged. Rommel is rushing his men into the Tunisian bridgehead, and for all strategic purposes as opposed to purely tactical delaying actions, had abandoned Tripolitania. Now, come what may, he must fight as he has never fought before, for the loss of even Gabès would seriously reduce his available ports. If that and Sfax went he could hardly hope to do more than dig his toes in : he could probably take no risk of any kind. His operations against the French are so to divert our limited strength here that he can pass the main body of his troops



into Tunisia unhampered. I think he will, for the time being, lose no opportunity of attacking the 1st Army. If he can drive us from Medjez on to the ridge just west of Oued Zarga he will have gained, for reasons already written here, a great deal. The drive in the south still further jeopardises our salient at Medjez. It looks as though a whole French division is in the bag. Bad : but, largely because phase one, the original gamble went on too long, inevitable. We could spare neither men nor materials substantially to assist them until they were in dire need. If only phase one had not gone on too long there might have been no phase three at all. We might have had enough men left at the beginning of phase two (see entry December 13) to smash through.

I bought a litre of good eau de Cologne to-day for 12s. 6d. only ! It will be welcome at home.

The C.-R. story, I've just learned, will be released in the London papers next Thursday morning. We may fly to Gibraltar to write it, for there is a cable head there. I think it unlikely, though.

This is a charming provincial town, but in the shops there is nothing but trash.

*January 23.*—The official mourning period for Darlan is up to-day. In Casablanca, as opposed to Algiers, the flags have been flying at the top of the mast for the past three weeks.

I saw Alan Brooke, Portal, Dill, Ismay and Sholto Douglas this afternoon, all, even Portal for once, looking very pleased with themselves. Alexander has gone, it appears. Very big things are cooking here. De Gaulle and Giraud have been brought together and their heads smacked : that, important though it is, is the least of things. "Of all the crosses I have had to bear in this war, that of Lorraine is the heaviest," W. C. is reported to have said. I can begin to believe that. There is a rumour about that even Italian delegates have been here : I do not believe it.

From our friends here I got the "low down" on the political situation and as soon as I get back to Algiers I shall write two articles, one on Algeria and one on Morocco, both of which I shall include in this diary. As to the conduct of the Germans here, I have several sworn statements by young men with whom the head of the Disarmament Com-



mission had homosexual relations. It is better not to publish them, although they are not without their comic side. One of the young men was a German Jew who reminded me of the famous Marius in the French series of stories whose favourite phrase was : "Étonné, je ne disais rien."

Gradually I am tracking down the truth about our Spanish friends who are in concentration camps here. There are more than 3000 of them in this country alone. If you love justice in the evil world, people say, "He has a bee in his bonnet. He would lose the war if he could restore republican government in Spain." I would indeed, but then, unlike Pilate who was a fool, I know the difference between right and wrong.

I argued my theory about the propriety of a military decision in 1943 with the active aid of Fascism with E. M. who counters it by saying that the longer wars continue—as I wish this to do if we can shorten it only by accepting Franco's aid—the less socially responsible do people become ; and that in the end there is nothing or little to choose between the states of mind that will exist. I accept this as plausible, but I would try my method : no one in history has ever conceived it better to fight longer than is absolutely necessary to secure a military decision by every device and alignment possible. And history is a mess.

A fascinating evening with America's legendary salvage man, Captain Sullivan, U.S.N., who is clearing the harbour here and, by cable, putting the *Normandie* to rights. All very technical, except that he says the British by the end of 1940 had salvaged two and three-quarter per cent as much shipping as they had built since September, 1939. Men who nowadays love their work and live it are so rare that I feel a better man to-night. Our conference with C.-R. is at 9.30 to-morrow : eight hours from now. I must sleep.

January 24.—Well. The ghost of Prince Sixtus of Bourbon Parma has been walking here this past week. In other words C. and R. have certainly, I think, been discussing a peace offer. And they wouldn't have discussed it if it had not been worth discussing. Otherwise why so much insistence by R. at our conference to-day on "unconditional surrender" and nothing less. Besides there's no doubt that both he and the P.M. have seen a number of people whose names do not appear on the officially published list of visitors.



No one in their senses would suppose that the P.M. and the President would travel here for the purpose of bringing de Gaulle and Giraud together, or to supervise staff conversations that could, with infinitely greater ease and competence have been held in London or Washington. Or, I think to heal our differences, wide though they are, on the conduct of this campaign. Such a meeting as this, to which a physically stricken president has travelled 5000 miles, is not held for the purpose of discussing the practical application of 1943's plans. All the time I am writing I hear the president's voice saying, not once but several times, "unconditional surrender." That, of course, was the basis of the 1918 armistice, but because it was never made clear to the world, a lot of people imagine that Germany surrendered on the fourteen points.

However, although the conference this morning was "phoney" I felt it my duty to write it up as far as I could; and this I did with something like 3000 words. My only hint that we had seen no more than the surface of what passed I framed in these words: All that has passed in the last week it is not for the world to know yet. The practical steps for 1943 are not the only matters that have been discussed, nor, there is some reason to suppose, is the published list of visitors complete; but until events unroll themselves we shall not know what commitments have been made in the names of the American and British peoples, nor whether they will approve them. Time alone can show us that."

At the beginning of the conference Giraud and de Gaulle were produced like a couple of rather shabby and embarrassed rabbits from the presidential hat, and made to shake hands in front of the world's cameras. They did it reluctantly, and have obviously not made it up. The censor did not allow me to say that "the fact, however, that they did shake hands for all the world to see is proof that sometimes diplomacy can triumph over prejudice." I added, which he did allow, that "for two days now de Gaulle, ill at ease this morning and puffing nervously at a cigarette, and Giraud, who is like a tailor's fashion plate of a *sauve* old man who has kept his figure, have conferred. Both C. and R. emphasised to them before their meeting that one thing and one thing only now matters or should matter to



either of them—the liberation of France. But I'm afraid that it isn't going to be as simple as that." The two men issued a rather silly, pompous and quite meaningless communiqué this afternoon.

Churchill, who addressed us rather as though we were the electors of Epping, was in excellent form, full of good phrases. Behind all this work "there is one design and purpose: the unconditional surrender of the criminals who have plunged the world into storm and ruin." Speaking of our entry into North Africa he said, "This great enterprise has altered the whole strategic picture of the war. It gives us the initiative in a very marked way and one of the purposes of this meeting is to labour that we may retain this sovereign treasure in our hands." He also spoke of the fact that his free and easy conversations with the president are one of the sinews of war, and that nothing will ever come between the two of them.

I wrote that, in my opinion, the point did not need stressing for it was apparent that real friendship exists between them. Any one who has been as close to them as I was for an hour this morning could not but be aware of this: their "asides," their concern for one another and above all perhaps the strong thread which linked and almost made one whole of what each had to say underlined that point the whole time.

In this war I have heard much of how the stress of prolonged struggle had told on the president; and I expected to see an ageing man. What I did see was a man a trifle more lined, perhaps a trifle quieter but no less firm and no less vital than the man I last saw in the White House five years ago. He was nervous this morning and had less time for smiling than he had then, but that, as I remember him, was almost the total difference in five long and agonising years.

Perhaps the famous cigarette holder was at a slightly less jaunty angle than it used to be; the face more serious, but there is no decline in power and mastery over circumstances. This heavy man, in a thin grey suit, blue shirt and black tie is one of history's great figures, and he knows it, but there is no touch, no hint of that messianic delusion from which his enemies say he suffers. There is a deep gravity, lightened



this morning by the news and by the pleasure that he obviously felt.

Of the Prime Minister, who sat on his left, it is possible only to say he is the same as he ever is when things are going well—a Peter Pan with a cigar stuck in his mouth. In his buttonhole he wore what appeared to be a diamond V for Victory above the small enamelled ribbon of the United States Distinguished Conduct Medal, given him by Pershing in the last war “for conspicuous services and bravery” he said, “but in my case they dispensed with the latter qualification.” He wore zip-fastened shoes which seemed from time to time to fascinate him. He was full of smiles and quips to-day, in a better and lighter mood than I have seen him in this war; and as he spoke of what happened this last week I felt he that was right when he spoke of results that are to come, results that will bring relief and happiness to all of us.

When we finally saw the two men we came through two rows of barbed wire on the inner ring of which hang hundreds of old tin cans, ready to give warning should any one try to penetrate that barrier. Up a hill, overlooking the shining face of the great Atlantic Ocean is the little villa where the President has been staying. It is ringed with guards who let us through into the garden below a terrace, shaded to-day by a green and red striped awning. Two chairs had been set out on the lawn, edged with pink geraniums and banana trees. Behind the chairs two porcelain hens decorated the bank, as though to remind those who were coming to see us that one of the primary duties of the Allies here is to feed North Africa well and quickly. Beyond the lawn, beneath a bougainvillea-covered roof was a sandbagged shelter, just in case . . . while overhead, roaring low over us, were the visible symbols of presidential energy: Catalinas, Flying Fortresses, and those twin-tailed fighters that look like some prehistoric pterodactyl in the sky. Harry Hopkins, looking a trifle less ill than when I last saw him in Moscow, came out to see that all was ready.

We sat around the President and the Premier to hear what they had to tell us of their work. It was hot and the sun was beating down on us, so that Churchill asked Roosevelt if he did not want a hat. “No, no,” Roosevelt said, “I was born without a hat: what would I want with



one now?" And in this informal way the conference began.

The President, when speaking of "unconditional surrender" reminded us of Ulysses Grant, whose words, used when attacking Fort Donelson and Henry in civil war—"the only terms I will accept are unconditional surrender: I propose to move upon your works at once"—he applied to the war of to-day.

In addition to all the time spent in conferences, Roosevelt has found time to inspect Clarke's new army, and he spoke of having seen "the bulk of several divisions equipped with the most modern weapons we can turn out." He also laid wreaths on the joint American-French graves in the cemetery at Port Lyautey, where those who fought against one another for the possession of the coast of North Africa lie buried together, as they should. On his orders the wreath was laid yesterday at Port Lyautey on the newly dug grave of the correspondent who was shot by Franco's anti-aircraft guns when travelling here for to-day's conference.

History has been made here in this last week and Casablanca will now rank with those towns whose names have passed into the vocabulary of ordinary man. For one stricken as he is, this journey has been an act of high courage.

I found this publisher's advertisement to-night for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights*. Of the former he says only: "Read the story of the movie that featured Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson." And of the latter: "No one who saw the powerful academy award movie should fail to read and own the strangest love story ever told." And we are fighting to preserve our right to culture.

*January 25.*—I flew back to Algiers this afternoon in a Hudson. To escape heavy cloud east of Fez we went up to 11,000 feet but began to ice-up, so we flew far out to sea until we came to a break in the clouds, and dived through it. The temperature rose from  $-5^{\circ}$  to  $-15$  centigrade in four minutes. Storm and ever lowering cloud drove us down to 300 feet and we scraped home at dusk into Blida. Not a pleasant ride. I told the office to-night my views on the probability of a peace offer having been brought by Franco. They can develop it as they wish.

*January 26.*—Another American envelope stamped "Restricted: equals British confidential." It is extraordinary how little Algiers offers to the mind: everything seems petty



and not worth the trouble of recording. I went to all the art exhibitions in town, but there wasn't a picture I would have paid 1000 francs for. It is true that none of the great painters are here, but there is a clumsy decadence about those who are. From every wall almost the tired, weak face of Pétain peers at the world. His old watery blue eyes, his "inferiority complex" moustache, like that of Strube's little man, and his weak, childish mouth make this old party a symbol of French defeat. The people cling to him precisely because in his person he is what they are in their souls: weak, licked, rotten. I speak of the urban petit-bourgeoisie, the mainstay of fascism.

I spent a pleasant and encouraging hour with Harold Macmillan. I like his views. He is upset about what has been done, and is as anxious as I am to put things right before we go into Europe (how easily one can talk about that now). His method would be—and I am persuaded by it—to push these present Vichy administrators to the point where they will re-establish the principles and liberties and laws of the Third Republic in its days of glory, by which I mean before the war. France then may have been corrupt, but it was the home and cradle of liberty and of culture, and it was equally, which we alas had ceased from being, a refuge for the oppressed. This, in Macmillan's view, would be an earnest of our sincerity and a sign to Europe that we are to be trusted. Beyond this point, he feels, we have no right to press the administration: the problem, thereafter, is one that France herself must play the greater part in solving after her liberation. If the local bosses will not play then Britain must use all her influence—if indeed Churchill has not already begun to use it—to force the Americans to make a change. Already there are vague signs that the move in this direction is taking place: some prisoners have been freed, an inter-allied commission has been set up to deal with the problems of concentration camps, which are not entirely political, of course, and, in a way the coming together of Giraud and de Gaulle—"a shotgun marriage," it is called here—should help. Although, of course, it is ridiculous that two generals of one army should do no more than have representatives at one another's H.Q.s. But it is an improvement, even though slow, on eight weeks ago. I suggested that Catroux should replace either Nogues or



Peyrouton. Even Giraud, perhaps. But they want him for a military post, probably, doubling the rôle of deputy C.-in-C. to Giraud with de Gaulle's representative. I think this is a mistake. We can deal with the military situation without Catroux. What we need is a little more understanding of the fact that in North Africa the paramount strategy is political. Not because of the people here but because Europe will temper its welcome to us by its opinion of what we do here. Catroux has a far more important rôle to play than that of a soldier.

M. was extremely sympathetic to my wish to visit Colomb Béchar and some of the camps and has promised to help me in every way. He is to visit some himself as a means of drawing attention to them. I had not seen him since just after Munich, and I was impressed with the generosity of his mind, but doubtful about his ability to stand up to Murphy. But he has character. A good man, anyway ; and brains.

He says that Giraud is trying to mobilise far too many men. He can neither arm them nor, without dislocating further the communications system, move them. Mobilisation means that the food problem will become no easier : it is already largely caused by bad distribution. But Giraud is still a 1914 man, alas !

There is talk of reducing the exchange from 300 to the £ to perhaps 176, but even so the big industrialists and entrepreneurs will not do so well as they were doing under Vichy, which is what they care about. They have no export market left, and all the shipping they did use is now requisitioned. Our military plans are such that no amelioration of this can be expected. On the contrary. Before we came they were getting coal at 700 francs. We charge 2500 and even were we to reduce the exchange to 176 the price would still be much higher.

The war is very remote from here, but it is going on as usual. I expect nothing more for eight weeks or thereabouts, unless we reform and dash at Gabes.

I hear the Americans have behaved with great gallantry in the south. These are men who have had a baptism of fire, have learned their job. It is most encouraging.

The Americans get their letters by air mail, in about ten days. By December 26 last R. had had no letter from me



since I landed. The men complain regularly about this, and I do my best. But I might as well try to grow celery in July !

*January 27.*—Here are my two articles about the political situation in Algeria and Morocco. The censor, much to my surprise, allowed the first one to go untouched. The fate of that on Morocco I shall not know until to-morrow.

It is impossible for any one to understand the political situation in North Africa without realising two basic facts : One, that the majority of Frenchmen here take no more than a passing interest in what is happening ; and two, that what really matters is not the effect of allied policy on North Africa as such, but how Europe will judge the effects of that policy. It will be the yardstick by which, when the time comes for attack and for the "liberation" of Europe our sincerity will be measured.

The first of these two basic facts requires some development. Other than the "old gang," which is either in power or jockeying for position, the active political elements are nearly all drawn from the ranks of youth. The remainder of the French population, which is for the most part middle-aged and middle-class, would be content to remain bewitched by "le maréchal," for whom, in the last three years a clever and incessant propaganda has built up a twin personality. For those who do not accept defeat as being in the permanent order of things he is still the bogus symbol of Verdun ; but for the remainder—the majority, alas—his fond and ancient face, which is to be found on most hoardings, in most shop windows and in nearly every home, he is the very image of defeat. For them France is symbolised in an old man with watery blue eyes, with a moustache like that of Strube's "little man" and with a tired weak mouth, the pattern and form of easily accepted decadence.

Of the active political elements here this must be said : One, that the members of Peyrouton's administration still have to prove by deeds the sincerity of their words. At the moment we have little to put in contrast with the Governor-General's first two acts : the appointment as *chef de cabinet* of Jean Fabregonde, who held the same position under the discredited and departed Chatel, and his reinstatement at Oran of the Prefet who was dismissed two years ago for being too pro-German. What little contrast there is it is



only fair to mention. Peyrouton dislikes Laval (and no doubt dislikes also the common cold) and he has publicly attended a playing of the "Marseillaise." Two, that the Civil Defence Corps is almost entirely drawn from the ranks of Doriot's men. Three, that by a species of blackmail the Legion has drawn into its ranks by far the largest number of active men who are neither Jews, freemasons, socialists or liberals. The policy of the Legion chiefs is fundamentally hostile to the allied cause, but, in spite of continued blackmail, their hold has naturally weakened since the allied landings in November. Four, that the de Gaullists, who are still under a cloud, have already proved that weakness in numbers can be compensated for by energy and determination. Five, that both the socialist and communist parties are "lyin' low and sayin' nuffin" at the moment.

There remain then the monarchists, whose rôle in the last two months has been, in my opinion, somewhat exaggerated. The fact that the Comte de Paris came here with the intention of profiting by the natural political chaos that was bound to result from our arrival has been given undue prominence. There is no doubt that this individual has a certain following here, but it is a sentimental following, born not of belief but of long family tradition. Now that he has been invited to leave and to return to his pig farm in Tangier, we have probably heard the last of this movement as a possible factor in the future of both France and Algeria.

Such are the elements—of necessity over-simplified—against which the admittedly unsatisfactory position must be thrown. If the purpose of this and of the succeeding article (which will deal with the political situation in Morocco) was merely to criticise allied policy since our landings here, it would be difficult to know where to begin or to end. But it is not, and of the past it is perhaps unnecessary to say more than this: had what might be called our "political landing" been as thoroughly prepared as our military landing much of the just criticism which the world has directed at the heads of Murphy and Eisenhower might have been avoided. But they were not so prepared, and it will now require considerable effort and good will to prevent their policy from reaching its logical conclusion—a North Africa governed in defiance of every principle laid down in the Atlantic Charter.

It is argued here by those whose business it is to find



excuses for the policy of the two "commanders" that there is a shortage of trained administrators in sympathy with our cause. Some Frenchmen with a greater experience of North Africa than any allied adviser possesses, would disagree with this. It is felt in many French quarters wholly sympathetic to our professional cause, that if the head of the State were himself to be a man of proved sincerity, the civil service would follow him without appreciable defection.

Such a choice, it would seem obvious, should fall on Catroux. But Catroux is being held for what is considered to be a more important post, and it is likely that he will soon be offered the position of Giraud's second-in-command. In this probable decision lies the core and matrix of our weakness, for it is a proof that we are still trying to fight war in the outworn belief that political and military strategy are two completely divorced weapons. What is important here is not that vast quantities of Frenchmen should be mobilised with a consequent dislocation of all internal communication systems—the food problem is mainly one of distribution—but that we should use North Africa to set Europe a great political example before we move in there.

In the last few weeks the pressure of informed world opinion as well as the local political spectacle has permitted wiser counsels to prevail with a consequently rising hope that more liberal policies will be forced on the administration. I am sceptical myself of this optimism, but I report it because it comes from a high quarter here.

As far as the British are concerned, at any rate, the hope is that in the months that are left us before we invade and liberate the continent of Europe, the regime here may swing towards what might be summed up as French law at the time of the Third Republic's highest power and glory: that is to say a liberal and not unenlightened democracy in which such institutions as anti-Jewish decrees and concentration camps had no place and where government was by consent and not by edict. It is felt that should we impose or attempt to impose more than that on the country here it might, with some justification, be interpreted as interference with affairs that should properly be the exclusive concern of a liberated France.

Against the realisation of this hope strong, and at the moment, strongly supported interests will bring every



resource that they can marshal. Many now in power or linked closely to them by almost indestructible financial ties have profited greatly from their country's downfall. They or their nominees have tasted a power which any democratic referendum would deny them ever again ; and they are naturally reluctant to take up once more the struggle which they laid down nearly three years ago. In this they have the inert and unspoken support of the mass of decent people who hoped that when the armistice was signed all strife was at an end for them and for their children.

It should be added that with the exchange pegged at 300 to the pound sterling, many great industrialists are no longer making a " good thing " out of their country's misery. For one thing their export markets are almost entirely gone, due not only to the loss of metropolitan France and of Germany as markets but to the primary call on shipping now vested in the allied high command.

Such in essence is the struggle going on, and it is by no means yet settled. What is needed to settle it is not so much physical force as force of character, and that is what we lack at the top. The problem is one of great urgency, and in my opinion we are moving much too slowly towards its solution. What we need here are senior allied administrators who believe sincerely that the " Atlantic Charter " is something more than a collection of words written on a piece of paper. Until we get that it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that as far as the Western Governments are concerned, we are now fighting a war to make the world safe for Fascism.

The political structure of Morocco differs basically from that of Algeria. Algeria is a part of metropolitan France, with the right to elect deputies to the central parliament : Morocco is not even a colony : it is a protectorate, nominally ruled over by the Sultan, but in fact governed by General Nogues and his advisers.

This is still the literal truth : Nogues rules Morocco as he wishes, and he has recently expressed to Pierre Parent, who is the President of the now disbanded Federation des Anciens Combattants, his view that the Americans are gullible—he used the slang phrase " des gobeurs "—and that he can twist them round his little finger. To date there is something in what Nogues says.

From my own knowledge of the general, which goes back



five years, I should say that there is more than a touch of the Vicar of Bray about him, for in the days of Blum's government he was an ardent if discreet supporter of the Popular Front and of the Spanish Republican cause, just as he was a supporter of the Vichy regime in the days of his country's downfall. For his failure adequately to support the principles for which we say we are fighting there are probably several explanations: One, his disappointments at not being offered either of the positions given originally by the United States authorities to Darlan and Giraud. Two, his uncertainty of our ability finally to win the war, an uncertainty reinforced by the allied failure to take Tunis in the initial rush. Three, the very strong hold which the big industrialists and entrepreneurs in Morocco have over the members of his civil staff.

That he would, if handled correctly and with that firmness of character which is so conspicuously lacking among the allied political advisers here, come on our side is, I think, certain. But until fundamental changes are made in the Moroccan administration this conversion is unlikely to be made manifest.

It is supremely important that some such change should shortly be made or that the services of Nogues should be altogether dispensed with, for the French population of Morocco is more politically minded than that of Algiers and more enthusiastically on our side. At the moment those who profited by the Vichy regime and enriched themselves at the expense of France are exerting every pressure to resist change. Some instances of this may be given. The spearhead of the pro-allied forces is the now illegal Federation des Anciens Combattants, a body replaced by the Vichy-created Legion. Its vice-president, M. Burger, who, at the time of the American landings, had served one and a half years of a five years' sentence for helping the Allies, has just been rearrested by Nogues, and flown more than a thousand kilometres south to Zagora, whence he was taken still further in to the Sahara, to Tagounite. He is now living there under compulsion and a perpetual surveillance.

This treatment is in sharp contradiction to that meted out to one Vittu de Karaoul, head of the fifth section of the Legion. Only a week or so ago the following orders were issued from his headquarters at 53 Avenue Mers Sultan,



Casablanca : " One, denounce all persons guilty of pro-American activity. Two, detect all de Gaullists. List their houses, the storeys on which they live and their mode of life. Three, the Germans have not yet lost the war. As soon as they shall have invaded Spain we shall see what these intriguing blackguards—'salopards'—will do." He adds that Pietri, French ambassador at Madrid, is in constant liaison with Pétain, and that he alone has the right to give orders. M. Vittu de Karaoul is still at liberty.

But liberty does not mean popularity. Some weeks ago there was a procession through the town at which the Legion was hissed and booed from beginning to end, while those few of the Anciens Combattants who were allowed to parade received a rapturous welcome.

The Legion is numerically rather than morally strong here, for in Morocco as in Algeria, men are induced to join by blackmail. Certain essential commodities can only be purchased with what is called a "bon," a form of coupon issued only after application for an individual purchase. It is issued only after the would-be purchaser has filled in a long document in which he is forced to answer questions about his past and present activities. Legionaries have little trouble in procuring as many "bons" as they want. Other people find their acquisition more difficult.

The natural focus of resistance to the democratic aims of the Allied Nations are the socially acceptable group of industrialists who have made large fortunes of between twenty and thirty millions of francs by selling grain, fish, eggs and vegetable fibre to Germany. Between June, 1940 and November, 1942, something like a weekly average of 20,000 tons of shipping left Casablanca and other Moroccan ports for France. In 1941—1,000,000 tons of grain, and in 1942—800,000 tons were so shipped abroad.

The producers of each commodity formed themselves into a "groupement," sold to the local administration, and sat back to enjoy their profits. With the coming of the Allies all that easy money, for reasons which I have explained, has come to an end. Naturally these gentlemen, with neither common sense nor morals, are disturbed and disinclined to help the Allies other than by drinking the cocktails of the United States consul.

The headquarters of these "groupements" is the in-



nocuously named "Automobile Club Marocain," whose committee not even the most enthusiastic optimist could call pro-Ally. Their names would mean nothing, but among them are the President of the Legion and the managers of a number of important "groupements," all of whom have suffered in their pockets since our arrival on these shores. Not all are lost to every sense of shame, however. One of them said to a friend of mine the other day: "Nous sommes pourris." "We have gone rotten: we want to take advantage of the situation." They have done so at the moment by turning their club into a Franco-American meeting place, to which two hundred American officers have been elected. But this camouflage has not deceived the more active and politically-minded of our French friends in Morocco, who see in this move only a compromise with the Vichy elements, which distresses them.

The remedy for this state of affairs lies in our own hands, for the excuse that Morocco is short of trained administrators is even less valid than it is in Algeria.

I have left to the last one of the more unpleasant features which still exists in Morocco, as it does in Algeria, concentration camps. There are at least four: at El Ayache, at Bou Arfa, at El Hazeh and at Bou Demib. In these there are among others at least three thousand Spanish Republican refugees, the men who fought the first of our battles for us. It is true that their plight is not forgotten, but it is not simply a question of letting them out, as justice demands. Work and food must be made available for them before they can once more become free men; and efforts are being made in this direction. But they are slow, and have not been given that priority which the plight of these imprisoned Jews, Socialists, Frenchmen, Poles and Spaniards should have made inevitable.

What will happen in Morocco naturally depends in some degree on what happens in Algeria, but its problems could equally well be solved on the spot.

Once more we come back to strength of character and to the necessity for making absolutely clear to those who now obstruct us that we mean what we say when we underwrite such documents as the Atlantic Charter. In Morocco the problem is easier than it is in Algeria because of the greater political awareness of the people and of a more active



enthusiasm for the allied cause. But people are simple and sometimes mistake naïveté for wickedness ; and that discourages them. We cannot afford a great margin of discouragement while we are held up outside Tunis, and for that reason, on the lowest view of all, which is expediency, it would pay us if we increased our efforts to clean up a situation which would be repudiated by both the American and British peoples.

These are future plans, as I heard them to-day. Shortly Alexander, who has been in Algiers, will take command of all land forces in North Africa, Tedder of all air forces. Spaatz will return to London. Eisenhower will remain here as supreme commander. The number of men here is to be substantially increased ; so it looks as though we are on our way into Europe. Rigaud, who is Giraud's political adviser, tried to censor the local publication of the Giraud-de Gaulle communiqué. It took the Americans until 4.15 this morning to force him to withdraw this ban. He is among the more notorious of the Vichy creatures here. I hear that this action will lead to strong U.S. pressure for his dismissal. If so and if the pressure achieves this, we shall be moving somewhere.

*January 28.*—My Moroccan article went through without a cut. It is sure that at last world opinion has begun to have an effect on the Murphy mind. But we have only just begun. I motored many miles to-day to see the wreck of a human being. He is a Frenchman, named Pierre Salverton, who, until last night, had been in prison for eighteen months for attempting to leave North Africa to join de Gaulle. He is more than half-starved and can barely stand. He is covered with sores, and bears on his body the marks of several floggings administered by those French authorities who are still in power here. He was, as I saw, released last night : we have been here more than two and a half months. Salverton, who is fifty-one, was wounded both in the last war and in this one.

A senior British intelligence officer said to-night that our only mistake here was not immediately to let the de Gaullists know that we had no further use for them after we had landed, and that there would be no place for them in the future France. That is for France and not for intelligence officers to decide in loud voices in public places.

I was very torn to-day. Dastrier de la Vigerie, who is a



monarchist, has been arrested for complicity in the murder of Darlan (how hard it is to write "murder" here), and is shortly to be tried by court-martial. He was one of the last people to see Bonnier de la Chapelle before that young man killed Darlan. He pleaded vainly with Giraud for a judicial inquiry and a trial for B. de la C. It is a matter of indifference to me if Dastrier, who is the brother of de Gaulle's air chief, is sentenced to one or 100 years on Devil's Island. The less monarchist scum there is floating on the already filthy surface of local affairs the better for us all, but on the other hand if we connive at injustice or possible injustice we ourselves are scum. I worried about this because Bergeret, Giraud's No. 2, who is as bad a pro-German as any of them, has searched North Africa to find a prosecutor in this trial and, although Algiers is full of men who are quite capable of performing this function fairly, has brought a creature called de la Roubine from Casablanca. De la Roubine is a man who has earned promotion to colonel by hounding down during the last two years and denouncing pro-allied Frenchmen to the authorities. Dastrier's defence know that the de Gaulle office in London has a full dossier on de la Roubine, but because of the Rigaud censorship can do nothing to obtain it. I decided in the end to cable the story to London, suggesting that the paper should publish what they can of de la Roubine's latter career. I finished by saying that even though Dastrier is a monarchist, he is entitled to justice. But is not likely to get it.

The poor trusting creature in charge of the defence still has such faith in our goodwill towards our friends, that he imagines we have only to publish for the B.B.C. to broadcast the information he needs to discredit de la Roubine at the court-martial. He forgets that the French administration here jams the B.B.C. French broadcasts. But not the German.

Our propaganda here is lamentable. The French have no idea of the indignation which our behaviour is causing in London and Washington.\* We are doing nothing at all, beyond the distribution of a few pamphlets, such as Wallace's speech, whose contents we contradict by our actions. I understand that at the M.O.I. there is a mass of excellent material waiting for shipment! It is more urgent than guns at the moment. We do nothing on the hoardings, from which Pétain smiles whimsically, looking like Peter Pan's



great-grandfather. The town should be plastered with posters. We should force the local papers to print British and American comment. We should show Charlie Chaplin's "The Great Dictator" at every cinema. We should tell the truth about Mers-el-Kebi. Every Frenchman believes, because he's never been told anything different, that the British fleet, without giving warning of any kind, crept in in the dead of night and blew the French fleet out of the water. These people want rousing. We are conniving here at a perpetuation of their apathy.

I went to the house of a remarkable Englishwoman to-day, who did much to prepare for and assist our landings here. For three years this gallant creature was cut off from her husband who is in the army, received neither letters nor money from him, but managed to keep her courage up. She hid de Gaullists in her house and helped them to escape, and even managed to find money to save the lives of several delightful donkeys who would otherwise have been turned into sausages. She met and guided ashore part of our attacking force. Six weeks ago her husband walked into the house and they are happy together again. She still looks very underfed.

In no less than seven districts in Algiers the first allied gift of milk for mothers and children was refused to Jewesses and their babies. It makes one despair. Or want to go out and shoot someone.

January 29.—Giraud held a press conference to-day at the Palais d'Eté, his official residence. He and I had a passage of arms, which I won. He issued a long, flowery statement about the necessity for union, and in the middle of this verbose document, inserted the words: "France beyond the seas can only repudiate racial doctrines of German inspiration" except, it so turned out, when you read a little further, for "insufficiently assimilated elements." As Giraud had said that he would answer questions I said, "In view of your repudiation of German racialism, when are you going to repeal the anti-Jewish decrees?" He was obviously furious and said, "That is none of your business." I pressed him, ventured to disagree and said, "The entire world, *mon général*, is very much interested in this question, and they have a right to know." He said, "It is nothing to do with the world: it is a matter for France to decide." I



then, rather stupidly giving him a loophole, said, "Then I am to report that you decline to speak on this subject or on that, I suppose, of concentration camps." "That," the old reactionary said, "is another matter," and turned away to a sycophantic French journalist who had another and an easy question to help him out. However Alan Moorhead, with some persistence, then raised my question again, asking that my words should be translated so that every one could understand precisely what the row had been about. Giraud now gave way and said that he would relax two of the decrees' most abominable discriminations. Property was to be given back to Jewish owners, and their children could go to school on the same terms as any one else's. This means little. Jewish property and cars were among the first to be requisitioned; and the schools are all closed! Note the use of the word "relaxation": not "repeal." Giraud also said that he will soon let larger numbers out of concentration camps, but he kept saying over and over again that he would move slowly "with method and precision." "Go slow," in fact, is his motto when it comes to the introduction of reforms which will bring this country up to the standards of 1939. He impressed me most unfavourably. A thoroughly reactionary, narrow fool.

I have been collecting American slang terms for negroes. Here they are: squacks, dinges, jigaboos, eight-balls, shines, shades, stove lids, clouds and boofos. And for women: quails, broads, ginches, judies, dolls, skirts, frails, round-heels and dishes.

I drank a magnum of Kuig '28 to-night, with a friend. It cost £6, but was worth it.

One of the censors has had the impudence to insert his own political beliefs into a directive. He says "correspondents should remember that in many cases it is only a short step from socialism to national-socialism." Asked to explain this pernicious rubbish he produced the following: That, to the dismay of many French officers, correspondents were identifying the allied struggle with left-wing views.

As it is my duty to dismay as many people as possible who should be dismayed by such information, and as, in any case, this officer's personal opinions are his own affair, I thought of reporting him to the War Office, but in the end



decided merely to ask that his knuckles should be rapped. They have been.

I sent a piece to London saying that Alexander is likely to become C.-in-C. of all land forces in North Africa, Tedder of all air forces and Cunningham of all navies in the Mediterranean. That is merely from putting two and two together. I hope I'm right. Eisenhower will remain generalissimo, I said.

*January 30.*—Eisenhower gave a press conference this morning. He is friendly. He confirmed my speculation about the changes, but they are still a great secret.

He says that the 6th Armoured Division is to be given Shermans instead of Valentines and Crusaders. Nearly 300 are on their way up from Oran. This is magnificent. Our tanks will be given to the French and to the Reconnaissance Regiment. The 1st Army, as soon as possible, will get back where it belongs—roughly from Medjez to the sea and American forces will strengthen the French and mass in the south. The punch will presumably come when the rains are finished.

We have a new armoured brigade here, I gather, equipped with Churchills. And Spitfire 9's. When we do punch we ought to get through. E. talked for an hour, mostly on the political angle, emphasising that however much London and Washington may disagree, his own advisers here never have. I asked him if he'd relax his usual rule and let us quote him on that. He agreed, but later issued a statement slightly at variance with so categorical—and as I happen to know, untrue—a pronouncement as the earlier one.

I bought a French translation to-day of Firbank's *Prancing Nigger* and *The Artificial Princess*. They should be better suited to the French tongue.

I go back to the front to-morrow. There I shall pick up my car and go south towards Ghadames. It will be clean after Algiers.

*January 31.*—I motored to Constantine to-day, through a new country in which the almond blossom is now in flower. From any distance it is like smoke on a windless day. The only birds I saw were crows. Spring has come suddenly: the buds have opened on the trees and where the road is lined we drove in gentle shade. I decided to-day that I will publish this diary and spent most of this



afternoon's drive thinking of a title. A colleague, who is writing a book on this campaign, is to call his *Addison Road for Algiers*.

At Army H.Q. I asked about the road to Tripoli, and if it could be managed now. Someone came through on a Jeep four days ago, so I will have a shot at it if I can.

The Germans have been dropping parachutists right back into the Algiers area, trying to disrupt our l. of c. They have done the job ineptly. Some of the men have been dropped on their first ride in an aeroplane. Most of them are the same sort of grade as our pioneers, and have an extremely rudimentary training in demolition. They have done no damage of any importance, and what bridges they have blown have been on side roads. They have not impeded traffic by an hour. Several Arabs who harboured them have been publicly shot "pour encourager les autres." About twelve lots have been dropped, and only one lot have shown fight. Most of them carry about £20 in francs, which is not as large as the reward offered by the French for their apprehension.

All this seems to point to a really serious shortage of manpower in German-held Tunisia. I think that is a legitimate deduction. Only one man from the Brandenburgers, the crack parachutist regiment, has been caught: the rest have been rubbish.

Deserters are on the increase, too. Both German and Italian. The number is not large—perhaps three a week, all of whom are just fed up. This may be due in some degree to the fact that assimilated persons, such as Poles and Austrians, are now fighting in the German Army here. It becomes clearer and clearer that it is an *ad hoc* force: some regiments are commanded by lieutenants: all are, so far as we can now tell, made up of heterogeneous elements.

What seems to me more significant, however, is the eagerness with which prisoners are talking. In the last three years about one per cent of Germans captured in the Middle East would talk: here the figure is about 98 per cent. The Germans are as garrulous as the Italians. The latter now, generally, both hate and fear the Germans; and they would seem to have lost all confidence in their officers, whom they accuse of cowardice and indifference. Quite a number of Italian prisoners in recent weeks have been in Libya as



garrison troops since May, 1940. All are well fed, and their morale is, to some degree, sustained by a daily postal service and a daily printed newspaper, two facts on which I have commented earlier. They are very short of transport and of fuel; and are using charcoal gas in considerable quantities.

I have been considering writing an article on all these points, but the silly cancer of being afraid of optimism has got to be rooted out before I do. This anti-optimism has been dinned into all our heads for so long that it has bitten even me, if that isn't too mixed a metaphor. I think a cautious article might be justified.

I shall do one on propaganda, too, or rather the lack of it. Until three days before the American landing forces sailed the U.S. Army insisted on managing the job itself. At the last moment it threw the job at the Office of War Information and told them to get on with it. Naturally they came unprepared. Bill Donovan's boys also insisted on having a hand, and Murphy is the boss of them both. The staffs of both disagree completely with his policy, and so nothing is done beyond sticking up a poster of Miss Deanna Durbin in their joint office. Garrett, the civil head of the department, is a man who knows what to do, but he hasn't been able to get going yet. In addition our P.W. boys want to run the show, and the M.O.I. also feels it should have a say.

Nothing, I repeat, gets done, because almost without exception a good staff disagrees with a bad policy. It is a shame to waste so many good American and British minds.

I heard another Americanism for a woman to-day: "a job."

I remembered to-day something else that Eisenhower said yesterday: he said that people in Britain and America were sore at him "because I haven't produced a Utopia overnight." Here exactly the limits of this charming person are defined. No one expected Utopia: they merely do not expect Eisenhower to give his moral backing to precisely that form of wickedness which the men at the front believe they are dying to destroy.

*February 1.*—I saw three storks on the way back to Thibar, one in his nest on a chimney pot. I have never seen



this before. It recalled to me, for some reason, how I found a copy of *Hansel and Gretel* in my stocking on the fifth Christmas of my life ; and of how, stricken with terror, I read it then and there, with the result that I have been frightened of the dark ever since ! This morning, when I saw the stork, I could hear the hiss of gas through the mantel on the far side of the room that was my night nursery. It was a lovely drive, warm, and the earth smelled of spring. We came back by the long route, through Le Kef and TebourSouk and over the mountain, because the usual road was choked with tank-transporters bringing up the Shermans for the 6th Division.

I put it on record that I should not be surprised if the Germans evacuated Tunis and Bizerta, after all. If they do it is a certain sign that they are nearly through. All these actions in the south—with a few Mark VI tanks are merely to secure the corridor for Rommel's troops to pass into Tripoli. I do not believe now that he will stand on the Mareth Line, which in any case was built to defend Tunisia against what I suppose we moderns should call "horse-borne cavalry." We knocked out two Mark VI's yesterday, and tried in every way to get hold of one. Extra leave was promised to any party who would bring one in. The Germans got one of them away and blew the other up.

Another sign : with very small forces we are holding off superior German attacks in the south. The first time in this war. Three German officers captured to-day were in Berlin four days ago. Another sign of *ad hoc* battalions. A.M. and I discussed to-day the paper we want to work on. A paper that explains the news, and reports in terms of fixed principles. No advertising. We want small salaries and all members of the editorial staff to have shares. We believe we could get all the best journalists in Britain on to it, and by "best" we don't mean men with names, but men with talents and principles. We want a technical editor with no policy, and a proprietor with no policy. We want whoever owns the paper to say that all news is to be treated according to its real value in terms of a belief in justice, and all the other "rights of man."

We believe it would sell like hot cakes and if a man or group of men were prepared to put up four or five millions we could kill every other paper's influence.



A pleasant, Utopian conversation, which will come to nothing.

Here is the tale of a sergeant in the Derbyshire Yeomanry. He went on patrol yesterday, down on the right flank. So that he and his men might have a quiet night and ample warning of the approach of any enemy patrol, he went forward and laid two rows of mines on a bridge across which, if the enemy came he would have to pass. Next morning the sergeant went forward to clear the mines away. He approached the bridge in a jeep, and was challenged in French by a sentry. Knowing that there were French units in the neighbourhood, he replied. Twenty Germans then jumped from the cover of the river bank and they and the "sentry" took him prisoner. They ordered him to drive them back to their positions on Djebel Masourah. The sergeant, as soon as his load was on board, drove instead for the mined bridge. By a charming miracle the front wheels missed the mines, but the back wheels set them off, and blew the jeep to smithereens. The sergeant, by an equal miracle, was unhurt. He jumped the parapet and dived into the wadi, whence he made his way back to his unit.

That evening (yesterday) he set out in an armoured car to clear the unexploded portion of his bridge mines, so that the patrol could go forward. Just one side of the unexploded row the Germans had concealed a mine and it went off underneath our armoured car. The sergeant is still unhurt! I hope he gets "a gong," which is army for medal.

*February 2.*—After thinking about the matter for half the night, I climbed out on a limb to-day and wrote an article setting forth, and, I hope, justifying a twin thesis, which I put in this way: "(a) that the so far hidden cracks in the German war machine are being made visible for the first time. Mere retreat, as in the Soviet Union, does not necessarily reveal those deep and mortal maladies of the national sort that erupt on the surface only when defeat is at last known to be inevitable: and (b) that the Germans, because of these cracks, are probably preparing to evacuate Tunisia without any real fight for its retention." I may have made a bad mistake, but I think not. I believe that the facts I wrote here on January 31, which formed the basis of my article, are more significant than anything that has happened since the battle of Smolensk in August, 1941, the



battle which destroyed once and for all the blitzkrieg as we knew it, and brought home to the German soul a conviction that the days of their moral ascendancy were over.

I see that the P.M. is in Cairo after a visit to Turkey. This elucidates his "aside" to Roosevelt at our conference when the question of a "release time" came up. I heard the P.M. say: "Don't bother about me: I shall be popping about." He has now popped.

To-morrow A.M. and I go to Tebessa, hoping to make a ride to Tripoli, but I think we are optimistic, and shall not get there. A colleague, whom I suspect of having started out on that journey, has been missing for a fortnight.

Storks, as well as Ju. 88's flew over here to-day. The former were beautiful and their wings as steady as those of aeroplanes.

About the Mark sixes, which the Germans call "The Tiger." It is a flop as a tank—perhaps another reason for using it here, if I am not twisting facts to suit my thesis. We sent out a Valentine to tow it in, but the thing could not be budged; and the Germans got it back, not before our men with tape measures and cameras had got to know a lot about it. We know its weight: we know its dimensions now, so we can calculate its maximum armour, which is what matters.

Our 25-pounders knocked them out. One (that which the enemy blew up) was hit eight times. These monsters are all right as a sort of pill-box, but as a tank they are a flop. They are not quick enough (15 m.p.h. I was told to-day) and are vulnerable. They must not become a legend.

*February 3.*—A.M. and I drove south to Tebessa this morning, taking the journey easily. It is lovely to be getting near country that you know borders on desert. The air is dry, and trips up your throat: it is cold and gradually, over the last thirty miles, the rich earth began to die away. Tebessa looks enchanting: a walled Roman city, and much of its ancient golden-stoned bastions are intact. It has an airy, almost fluid appearance as you first glance at it as though it were Greek. Aristocrat rather than bourgeois. We drove out immediately to Fredenfall's H.Q. to see if it is possible to make contact with the 8th Army by any land route. It seems to be; and we shall go south to-morrow to Tozeur where there is a sort of base for the desert patrol.



American H.Q. are in a forest which you approach romantically through a rocky gorge. If Red Indians had stepped out and challenged us instead of courteous sentries I should hardly have been surprised. Without in any way altering the appearance of the forest from the sky, the army has built a town inside it, much of it blasted out of the mountain. The "caves" are then panelled with the pines that have been cut. They are all lighted by electricity. I have seen no such preparation since the barriers rose outside Moscow in the winter of 1941.

These men mean business, but one hopes that all this labour will be in vain ; and that the army will have closed in on Tunis long before it has really justified itself in terms of human effort.

The Americans are doing well ; and they now threaten Sfax. At Sened they hold the dominating position on the hills, and at Fyad they are holding strongly, positions at the foot of the hill, which of course is not so satisfactory. They are operating on a small scale, for the supply problem here is well-nigh insoluble : a one track narrow gauge railway, and not nearly enough road transport. But they are bringing much stuff in nevertheless.

To-day, pursuing my inquiries into enemy morale, I asked the American intelligence colonel what he had to say. He intercepted a letter, half finished, on a man taken prisoner yesterday which said : " We have lost the war, but we don't yet know it." The letter would have had to go through a censor. A German corporal who refused to speak was told : " If you don't we'll give you a safe conduct back to your own lines." He spoke. The majority of Italians when taken prisoner immediately ask for a job, saying that they are unwilling allies of the Germans.

I fear all this is a trifle Lozovskyish ; but times have changed, and there may be much in it.

The American field hospital here is very chic and up-to-date, even though in tents. The dental section is as up-to-date as any I have seen. They have to cart all water, which takes transport. Six hundred casualties can be taken at a time. There were over 500 in yesterday. There is a staff of fifty nurses.

The Americans get mail sometimes in ten days. I have not had a letter this year !



*February 4.*—This has been a wonderful day, one of those rare few hours which give more than they promised. It began at Tebessa : it is finishing now far south at Tozeur, an oasis of great beauty, where I have found what, without a great deal of hope, I set out to find : the virtual junction of the 1st and 8th Armies. It is a spasmodic junction at the moment, but it is incessant and none the less real for that ; and to-night I dined with a man who has come overland from Cairo. This is—or should be—a great newspaper story.

A.M. and I, in two Jeeps, left Tebessa at about nine this morning ; we arrived here soon after six this evening, guided more by instinct than by our maps, which are wrong in almost every particular south of Feriana.

We began by an inquiry at Corps about the road—on the principle that there would be far less correspondents in German camps if more had taken this precaution. Touch wood : we are not out of the danger of capture yet. We drove to Feriana, arriving in time for a fighter attack on the Thelepte aerodrome, on which a quantity of Bostons are adequately protected. The country is dull : that half-world where cultivation does not quite know where to cease, or the desert to begin. There are trees and that kind of small hill over which enemy fighters can swoop to good effect ; and once, from a hilltop a wide view of the Thelepte plain, and its promise of illimitable desert beyond, studded, as the Grecian seas are, with vast, crumpled islands. These are mountain ranges, rising, as land does from the ocean, with clearly marked littorals. We went through Feriana, past the notice that says : “ Watch out for enemy aircraft ” (“ Are you serious, darling ? ” my U.S. chauffeur shouted when he saw it) and down the road for Gafsa. About fifteen miles south we cut across, south-westward into the desert. Not true desert yet, for it was covered with camel thorn, and very lovely in the benign sun of midday. The track was not clear ; and we lost our way in a maze of cactus wind-brakes, too far to the west. An old Arab with beautiful hands—but very dirty ones—gestured our road to us ; and we went back into difficult loose sand to find a crossing over the dry Wadi Kbir. We made two abortive tries, finding marsh each time, and then drove east to the railway where we turned south and rushed from dune to dune, hoping for



the best. It was granted us. In all this time I saw no living creature but snails.

At Sidi bou Baker a courteous dwarf set us on our way and we raced south through great flocks of sheep and goats into the barren lands beyond. Once or twice we met caravans of fifty camels moving north to better feed, but otherwise we might have been alone on the face of a new planet. We lunched in a warm gully, hacked through the crimson hills, and then jerked south again into a wide plain bounded by titanic islands with tops that looked as though a carpenter had spent his purgatory planing them into perfect symmetry. We thought them very fierce, but we did not then know what was to come later. At 2.20 we saw houses and trees ; and the railway came suddenly into sight again. I thought we were near our journey's end, for only now was I to discover how inaccurate was the map. Actually the "piste" had moved west during the last hour ; and we were still nearly a hundred miles from our target.

We drove into a valley whose barren folds of limestone and sand not even a series of rich springs could charge with life : the mountains closed in on us ; great pillars of thrashed and tumultuous rock that flung their peaks across the sun. The air was very hot. My chauffeur stopped and fired his tommy-gun at a vulture. The noise was horrible : as though someone had slammed a pair of heavy doors at the end of a long windowless corridor. Then we came out again into a wide rock-strewn plain on whose far horizon, like heavy clouds, more ranges smoked towards the blue but now hazy sky. Here on the sand to which, like a disease, an integument of pale lichen was attached, we raced forward at fifty miles an hour. And once more we went wrong ; and found ourselves at the town of Mourales, the first allied men in uniform whom they had seen. The town turned out to welcome us, including a wild young woman in flannel pyjamas with cascades of golden hair racing behind her as though she were breasting a wind. One man, in this remote place, held a copy of *Adolphe* in his hand.

It was a parched and lonely place, this, made tolerable by a fine grove of eucalyptus, by blue paint on the shutters of the houses and a battered enamel advertisement for Chocolat Menier—a commodity now long denied these friendly people, whose children at least look well fed.



Afterwards we drove an hour and came into a valley that was a corridor, littered with stones, between two "Chinese" fortresses, each some twenty miles in length. Such at least it seemed. From one end to the other the great flat hills rose above us to more than a thousand feet, each precipitous, each with an ivory base, smooth as the tusk, some three hundred feet high, surmounted by crimson bastions, carved with snouted figures. Such indeed were these limestone and sandstone ranges, and in the long centuries the former had been so lashed and ground away by wind and rain, that the latter hang out like balconies carved and sculptured by men who loved the obscene but beautiful. Deep fissures ran almost regularly from summit to base every few yards, so that the mountains look as though they have been built by men in terrible and remote ages.

The floor along which we drove was studded with great rocks around which we dodged our little way. They fall from the summits when the frosts come. Here there were not even snails. And then, as strangely and suddenly as the valley began, it ended, in a little phosphate mining town, with grassy railroad sidings and little cafés. Here we were cheered by Senegalese soldiers and saw a French officer on a horse. He rode so well and with such pride that he was like a statue of regenerated France. This was at Metalaoui.

Beyond here is the great desert. Flat, eternal, clean and full of beauty that you cannot see. We drove fifty miles through it with the dying sun on our right. On this road the Germans sometimes drop parachutists to lay mines. I tell this because we saw a blown-up truck as proof. Otherwise it would not be worth the telling, for you can venture on no road or track here without someone telling you that German patrols or parachutists are about. They don't do it out of malice but because, having so little romance in their lives, they must give a terrible label to strangers who do not speak to them.

The tribes are moving north now to get the spring grass ; and we had to drive slowly to avoid the many concourses of camels and of their human appendages.

At dusk this glorious oasis, crowned by a great minaret came suddenly into sight, with white smoke from the cooking fires of evening lying on the low roofs like mist. The long grove of date palms was like a slash of black paint against



the horizon, and the banked salt on the borders of the saline marsh beyond this town was luminous. The place looked as though it might contain a revelation. It did. We drove through streets framed with elaborately carved homes into a square of lovely colours—ruined only by a beastly stunted obelisk, which is the war memorial, prepared to camp out in the cold and dine off bully beef. But we found a luxurious hotel, and this is written in a warm bedroom off which there now steams a bath for me.

We dined to-night with a French lieutenant who was in Cairo less than five weeks ago. He came here from the 8th Army in a Jeep. When he came to Nefta, the oasis near here, and for the first time since June, 1940, saw a corner of France, he wept. There are three British soldiers in town and one New Zealander at the moment. There will be more to-morrow.

*February 5.*—Early this morning I went through the palm gardens and down back streets in the Arab town to a little white fort, in whose cool basement I found the men I had come to see. There were four of them: all bearded, and with those peculiarly clean and delicate skins that the desert gives to those who live in it. They have been here three days, after what must have been—although they would deny it—an arduous journey. These four (two of whom are wounded in the legs) set out with their party from a village south of Misurata on January 16. They could, had it been their function to do so, have made the journey in a week. Their job was to reconnoitre the flank of the enemy, determine its strength and mobility and to discover its direction of movement. To this end they stayed in several places for several days, going out on their patrols in Jeeps. Only once were they misled by information and that was in the case of Natul, a town in which the enemy had concentrated the strength of his right flank. But they discovered their error in time and dived for the concealing folds of the desert. Only once were they given away—they say that in the hours of daylight not an hour passes without their seeing someone. On this occasion two Messerschmitts had them pin-pointed; came very low over the hills, and dived straight on them out of the sun. These fighters in seven dives destroyed all their seven trucks.

These men—who are of Bagnold's Long Range Desert

Group—waited for a party of David Stirling's men, the Special Air Service Regiment, and with the aid of their transport and of some camels they were able to hire made further progress. A third desert organisation known as P.P.A. which means P——'s Private Army (P is half Russian, half Belgian, brought up in France and naturalised British) also joined up about 200 miles from here; and two of the jeeps the three units could muster brought in some of the wounded and two hale men to drive back borrowed transport to fetch the rest.

They all came in the evening, including a sergeant of the Army Film Unit, who had lost all his film in an engagement with an armoured car. All look extremely gay and well. The jeeps seem to carry everything except a six-inch howitzer. In addition to a load of more than a ton when they set out, they have at least three spare tyres.

Oddly, water is the one commodity they do not need to carry. The frightful desert abounds in good wells. They carried rations that began to get badly short only a day before their arrival, when they went down to half a small box of sardines a day. In the soft sand, through which an enemy salient forced them to detour, the jeeps only did eight miles to the gallon, which meant that two arrived here with less than a pint of petrol between them.

They seem very reckless. On several nights they lit huge fires within eight miles of the Herman positions and had rum parties? One of the men who came in to-day has lost an eye. He was on the last Commando raid into Sicily and was slightly wounded. A German soldier came up and slogged his eye out with a rifle butt. He doesn't like Germans any more, and has refused to be invalided from the army. He is getting his own back with the knife-knuckle-duster implement.

Among the men in to-day—all of whom walked more than 100 of the last 200 miles—are the first Frenchmen to be seen here wearing the Cross of Lorraine. No doubt Peyrouton would like to lock them up, but I say that these bearded warriors who have fought for France should be shown to the people of Algiers. Then we should know.



On January 27 a friend, now here, quoted a soldier at the front as saying "Marianne has awoken." The French censor cut this reference to the republican symbol and put "France has awoken." There is the key to their black souls.

Two Messerschmitts came over this afternoon and shot us up twice for reasons best known to themselves. I leave in the morning at first light, but I shall never forget those four men in their monkish cell, with a chalk drawing of a liner escorted by a Sunderland on the wall. Very Douanier-le-Rousseau in its limpid and detailed simplicity, and full of colour.

These men are the first link between the two North-African armies: the First and Eighth. As such they have performed an historic function of which they seemed blissfully unaware. They were more concerned not to lose their souvenirs: maps printed on silk handkerchiefs.

The French and British are very active here in their work behind the enemy lines, to which territory they send bands of Arabs trained in demolition. This slipping across goes on each night. Very fine types of men, with alert cynical faces, slightly amused and very faithful. They recaptured two jeeps from the enemy last night.

David Stirling, colonel of the S.A.S., is believed missing. He wandered into Gabes to blow a train, and was ambushed. He is said to have been seen walking back, but that was some time ago: about ten days. He is a fine young man, and his disappearance would be a severe tactical loss.

A British major said to-day that he couldn't understand why the Germans didn't bomb A.F.H.Q. in Algiers, whose identity has been published. Said an American major at once: "Because it's worth fifty divisions to them." Fifty is surely an exaggeration.

A miserable slogan on my bedroom door. "Yesterday, the hour of exterior defeat. To-day, the hour of discipline and punishment. To-morrow the victory over ourselves."

*February 6.*—We left Tozeur at first light in rain and biting wind, in two jeeps; and we took the wrong turning at the first oasis. After half an hour in driving rain we discovered our mistake and came back. I was wearing a Balaclava and a mica face-mask but even so was frozen stiff. We



had set out to discover a desert track direct to Tebessa, and found its possible beginnings at about nine, just beyond one of the most effective and primitive engineering feats I ever saw. This was a smooth hillside, striped with palm leaf fencing in about twenty tiers, and so sloped as to pass all rain through a series of complicated channels into a stone reservoir. There is no well in or near this village, and this system supports about fifty people and three times this number of palms in whose shade grow apricots, figs, oranges, and all manner of vegetables.

When we turned into the desert the wind was bitter, coming from the mountains to the north. We drove across it for about thirty miles until I was paralysed with cold, and thought, almost with pleasure, of the night I spent outside Moscow in a car in late December. It was as uncomfortable and as chilling as that. We put up a pair of gazelles, graceful and lovely creatures who, I am happy to remember, got away before our chauffeur could get his rifle out.

Then we turned into the mountains, and the sun came out. They were like the surface of a convulsed and empty planet, riven by deep, dried river beds in which no water ran. The rocky track whipped like a lash round the smooth walls of the summit and then dropped into great and lonely places. We forgot that men were fighting, or even living a few miles away. Suddenly there was a long, tenuous black line drawn in the red hills ; and in the wind it moved like a dark sea. This was the oasis of Temerza, a bed of rich earth watered by springs, laid in the silicate and limestone. We came round a corner and on our right was a rich garden, planted in a winding gully, some of whose rocks towered far above the trees. Half a mile farther on the little town of dried mud brick houses, not without a simple functional elegance began and ran about 400 yards to a wide river bed of great antiquity. It was walled, as though men with sweeping knives had sliced the mountains. This was the frontier between Tunisia and Algeria. Beyond the dried bed the town thinned out to a last eight-storied building plastered against the cliff. Except for a simple brick decoration the building was plain and lovely. In that world of dissymmetry that regular little joke was as noticeable as a jewel in a Ethiop's ear would be.

With regret I drove on, into the wind, and up the wide



river bed, following tracks that had been made several days ago. The mountains fell away on the south and we came out on to a high tableland from which we could see far south over the desert, flat, rancid and dotted with great rings of blazing white where the salt lakes are drying up. The world here was wider than the sea. This clotted sand was dappled with the shadows of huge clouds, but they were tiny. We lost our way on the loose sand and called to the Arabs we saw, but most of them ran and hid, leaving their flocks behind. Only the female camels remained still, suckling their fragile grey babies who were indifferent to us. At last we persuaded a venerable old party to perch on the bonnet of the leading jeep ; and we drove across shallow ploughed land, sparsely sown with barley, until we found a marked road, along which two ragged camel caravans were moving north. We lunched in a wadi, crouching to escape the wind. When the sun went in, hail fell and beat on to us, so we drove quickly through a deserted world in which none the less there was always some human figure with its ragged Djellabah whirling round emaciated legs.

Before we came to Tebessa the clouds came down to meet us ; and we passed a Roman ruin that seemed almost as though it had been drawn on the sky in whose flat spaces there is snow to-night. Sore and cold we came back, but happy in a job well done.

*February 7.*—Now that all the pages of my loose-leaf notebook are finished, the actual physical compilation of this diary is becoming highly complicated. Whenever I go anywhere where I might be captured with all my " effects " as they seemed to be called, I have to take a new notebook, and start again, with the result that this diary is now in about four parts.

I came back to Thibar to-day, to find that the battle for Djebel Mansour had been a failure. It was the same old game : too little asked to do too much. On this occasion there was also an inexcusable mistake. The parachutists were to take one range of hills, north of the Robaa Pont-du-Fahs road ; and the Foreign Legion were to take the opposite height, so that each might be free from flanking fire. They were to come down on to the road and cut off all German units to the west of their rendezvous. The parachutists attacked, but the Foreign Legion, who were all ready to do



so, stayed where they were. They stayed where they were because some one forgot to order them to advance !

The parachutists took their objective with only fifteen men, and were then reinforced by the remainder of a battalion. Accurate counter-fire wounded twenty-five per cent of them ; and they were forced to retire. A company of Grenadiers then attacked the re-formed German positions, and were mown down from ten yards. There is much bitterness among the men ; and even a sergeant of Grenadiers was heard to say that it was as " big a bloody mess up as Mons." Another said " you won't get the men to attack that hill again." This was not, of course, literally true ; but coming from a Guards' sergeant it is a measure of discontent with the command.

The middle of March looks like being the earliest date for attack. On about the 21st, Montgomery will have four divisions ready to attack ; and we should be ready by then—if, indeed, we have to attack at all.

In the south the Americans, on Anderson's orders, have retired to somewhere near Gafsa : because of their shortage of equipment they were getting out on a limb. All this news of setback must be very disheartening at home, but it is all small scale and can only delay our final successful assault.

I condemn bitterly these costly attacks with " penny packets " but it is argued here that it is better to suffer losses and disappointments than to keep the army static until the great day of irresistible attack. I do not agree. To sit still for six weeks is far less damaging to morale than to attack in too few numbers—which the men know perfectly well are too few—and lose every little battle.

The ride was glorious to-day. I explored new roads through the mountains, and came beneath a great circular rock plateau, 1000 feet high. Its walls were smooth as glass. Igneous rock, formed from a dying volcano—this area was volcanic once—and hard enough to resist the winds and rain. As a result the surfaces of the foothills have gradually been washed away leaving this broken column to soar up in all the grace of its tremendous majesty. There is much lava about here.

*February 8.*—It would seem, putting two and two together, that Montgomery will be ready to attack with four divisions on about February 21. That seems a trifle early



to me, but I don't think my addition is wrong. We shall not be ready until about March 15 at the earliest ; and the weather will still be a factor deciding the date. The 46th division is now in the north.

A number of five and six days old papers arrived to-day. I see that a lot of nonsense is being written in the London press about the Mareth Line. It doesn't really exist ; and I wrote an article to-day expatiating on this, and telling what I learned down in Tozeur. That was all. I go to Algiers again to-morrow, hoping that red tape will not prevent my flying to Tripoli for a day, as the R.A.F. have arranged to do this. While there I shall try to visit the major concentration camps. I shall write an article on our lack of propaganda and an analysis of Rigaud, the infamous chief-of-police-cum-censor. I shall also get Brunel's idea of how Algeria ought to be run. He is the man who should have been the Governor General. Pleasant and idle day, with the bad news that the deflation of the franc to 200 dates from February 1. Bad news, for me personally that is : but good.

*February 9.*—I drove a colleague to Constantine to-day, where once more it was very cold. All day we met American convoys moving east : not (because they were on the Souk-Ahras—Le Kef road) to Tebessa and the south, but almost certainly to Robaa and Bou Arada where we need a small victory.

This evening—I can hardly write it—I heard by telephone from Algiers that my desert stories have been stopped on some idiotic pretext or other—just as though the enemy doesn't know about what is happening !

*February 10.*—My colleague drove this morning, and skidded us into a ditch where the car turned over on its roof ; and we had to climb through a window to get out. No man could have had an easier introduction to so unpleasant a happening. We slid gently round, hit a cliff and turned almost over without a sound. Not a pane of glass was even cracked. I had a bottle of gin and one of lime juice in the back. They are still intact. So is my typewriter. All the time we were skidding I could think only that " we shan't reach Algiers to-day which means I can't get my stories through the censor " and when we did turn over, I thought, " well, there goes my chance of getting this car made like new, so that I can change it for a jeep." That was



all. As I lay in the car it occurred to me that we might catch fire ; but that was all. I had been terrified of a skid all morning, but when it came I was passionately interested in feeling it. This curse of fear during anticipation is making life a misery.

We drove through a snowstorm this morning. Sunny Africa ! For more than 200 miles we passed an average of one American truck a minute, all going east. Men, half frozen and blue, guns, ammunition and stores. It was very impressive ; we must have passed a whole infantry division in the last forty-eight hours. They drive recklessly but well.

So ordinary did our accident seem that I forgot to record that with help we pushed the car back on its wheels, filled it again with oil and petrol ; and drove off. We got to Algiers in excellent time.

I fought for my stories and made the censors let them go at least as far as the office where they will be published only if the Military Advisers give consent. This will at last enable political pressure to be brought to bear on these gentry. That is something.

To-morrow the P.M. will announce the changes in the high command here. As I have already "announced" them in the N.C. I didn't send any further information. I was too worn out after the long drive : 859 kilometres in two days, on top of my desert ride of four days.

*February 11.*—I am very tired and disgusted with Algiers, which is still unclean. Eden said to-day—and not for the first time—that criticism of the regime here is out of place and that all that matters is that Frenchmen should be united to fight Germany. If they were so united there would be something in what he said ; but they are not. And they never will be under Giraud. What is happening here—while we are engaged in fighting the Germans—is that a large army is being built and officered with pro-Vichy anti-Germans ; men in my view indistinguishable from Fascists. This army could, when the time comes, go into France, where it alone would be vested with power, where it alone would be the only stable body ; and it could impose Fascism on France, as Franco with his Moors imposed it on Spain. Unless events should fortunately decide otherwise. The French forces here are to be withdrawn from the line for training. The very fact that a general mobilisation has



taken place actually hampers rather than helps us. We are losing the place as fast as we are winning the war.

The administration here looks better than it was, but is still morally unsound. It has begun to administer, and as such has performed just enough liberalising acts to ensure its continuance in office. Fundamentally it remains rotten and vile; and is merely shrewd enough to give a little to world opinion in the hope that the public conscience will be sufficiently appeased for the public eye to shut and the public attention to wander elsewhere. If we are not very careful it will achieve its objects. I look on it as one of the paramount duties of my journalistic career to see that public attention does not wander. So long as the Bergerets and Rigauds are at large and in power nothing is fundamentally changed.

The car will take four weeks to mend.

This town is like a clumsy dentist's drill on the nerves.

*February 12.*—Three items from to-day's paper. Highest attraction offered by the local music hall is Leveille, "who taught the Prince of Wales how to play diabolo in 1908." In the job vacant column, one demands a "bonne cham-pooingneuse." In the personal column a man advertises for a pair of shoes.

I wrote this "open letter" to Eisenhower to-day. I wonder what its fate will be,

*February 12, 1943.*

Hotel Regina : Algiers.

Dear General Eisenhower :

At a recent press conference you warmly invited those who were present to submit to you any ideas they might have for improving a political situation which you would be among the first to admit is far from satisfactory. You undertook to examine with care and sympathy any such ideas submitted as a result of your generous request. That is why I write to you.

At the same conference you complained, but not very seriously, of those who were disappointed because you had not produced a "Utopia" in a few weeks. With such fantasists I am even less concerned than you are. But, General Eisenhower, we have now been here three months, and there is something between "Utopia" and administra-



tions which are fundamentally hostile to every principle laid down in and guaranteed by the Atlantic Charter.

With our moral support such administrations function to-day in both Algeria and Morocco. They are a twin stain on Allied sincerity. Their continued existence is a weapon in the hands of our enemies, for by what measure we now fall short—on this first test that history has applied to us—of implementing our solemn undertakings, will Europe moderate its enthusiasm for us when we come upon its shores.

Mr. Gladstone—he was our last great statesman but two—once said that “what is morally wrong cannot be politically right.” I venture to quote this aphorism because I am sure you would not disagree with it, and because it is the basis of the argument I propose to develop.

The Giraud administration is morally indefensible, and its continuance in power is therefore politically inexpedient. I make that statement for several reasons.

1. Because General Giraud is himself a reactionary and as such is *ipso facto* committed to policies which are the antithesis of those for which the American and British peoples are fighting this war. They are not fighting this war to beat Germany and Italy as such, but to obliterate for ever Nazism and Fascism of all nationalities. In this they differ from General Giraud, whose soldiers are dying at the front to destroy the appeal of precisely those doctrines which he is supporting at the rear.

2. Because Giraud is in fact hampering our own military operations by mobilising and training a vast army which can have little or nothing to do with the outcome of the present struggle. It is said, and as far as I know it has not been contradicted, that Giraud proposes to create something like eleven African divisions. Native soldiers are brave soldiers, but it is an axiom of French military doctrine that such troops cannot hope to be effective against European armies unless 50 per cent of their personnel are themselves European. This quantity is not available.

You will understand then that those of us who have a knowledge of the Third Republic are fearful about the only use to which this army can be put. When France is finally cleared of both the German and Italian invaders, Giraud's colonial army will be the one dominant, stable and coherent force in the country ; and as such it will be able to impose



the doctrines of its General Staff and of their political advisers on a disarmed and disorganised population.

3. Because even if Giraud is not a "politician"—an odd claim to be made by the political head of the French Empire—he has surrounded himself with and selected as collaborators in key positions of his administration, men who are indeed active. They are active in their dislike and distrust of the purposes for which the allied nations are fighting. This is only natural: a return to democratic principles would sweep them immediately into the dustbin where they belong.

Allow me to refer to the more important of General Giraud's collaborators: General Nogues, the Resident of Morocco, General Bergeret, the deputy to the High Commissioner, Jean Rigaud, who controls home affairs, the local censorship and the police, Marcel Peyrouton, the Governor General of Algeria, and Tarbe de St. Hardouin, who is concerned with foreign relations. There are men, General Eisenhower, whose names should adorn not the honoured pages of the official gazette but the files of the police court.

You must be aware that even after your forces had landed here, Nogues and Bergeret planned an abortive rising of the population against your soldiers and in favour of our enemies. (Incidentally the general excuse against the installation of democratically minded administrators is that such appointments would lead to popular risings which would obstruct our main military purposes here. I am sure you do not believe in this nonsensical bogey.)

You are no doubt also aware of what are perhaps the more savoury details of M. Rigaud's career. In case your political advisers have hidden them from you, may I point out that this individual was the creature of Lemaigre de Breuille, chief of the "Cagoulards" in pre-war France, and that he handled the finances of this Nazi-terror group. It was he whom the Germans installed as editor-in-chief of *Le Jour*, when they dismissed Leon Bailby from that position.

Let me quote M. Peyrouton. He once said; "I am proud of being a Hitlerite."

There is no need for me to elaborate this indictment, or to list ways in which our war effort has been and is still being obstructed. Neither need I say anything about those



elements hostile to us who have not been put in prison by the administration : Doriot's men, the S.O.L., the Legionaries who so nearly staged a putsch on the night of February 7. All these things are known to you or to your advisers better than they are known to me.

At the press conference to which I referred at the beginning of this letter, you stated that Darlan had offered to "fire" any members of his administration provided that you could replace them ; but that, owing to a shortage of trained men, you were unable to take advantage of this offer. I wonder if your adviser forgot to inform you that there is no such shortage here, but that honourable and incorruptible men who could provide an alternative administration are unwilling to work in partnership with men who had proved themselves to be traitors. This unwillingness naturally operated with particular severity in the case of Darlan. (Such men will no doubt be accused of "playing politics," but I am sure you would agree that only the most elastic of imaginations could so label such refusals.)

Let me then come to the constructive part of this letter.

None available is more fitted to the post of High Commissioner than General Catroux. I do not need to elaborate this self-evident proposition, except perhaps to say that he would soon clean the army command of its more vicious elements, and could nominate a replacement for Nogues.

The obvious choice for Governor-General of Algeria is Charles Brunel, whose influence on the public life of the country for nearly 20 years has been clean and wholesome. His name—and not only as that of the Mayor who created the modern city of Algiers—is widely known and as widely respected. He belongs to no party, subscribes with all his heart to the principles of the Atlantic Charter, and is incorruptible. You may know that in order to sully his good name in your eyes Bergeret arrested his son on a trumped-up charge as soon as we landed here. His son is now free again.

In place of Rigaud, whose dismissal is a matter of some urgency, you have the choice of at least four trained men, all enjoying the confidence of the police, all men with clean records of devoted service to the State. Muscatelli, who was formerly director of security to the Governor General, Luiset, who has been relegated to the sub-prefecture of Bône, Bringuard, who was director of security to the High Com-



missioner, and Achiarry, whose knowledge of internal matters is equal to that of any one in the country, and is certainly greater than Rigaud's.

In the place of de St. Hardouin, you have at your disposal the services of such men as Gentil and Massigli, both of whom have had wide diplomatic experience in the service of the Republic. I have left Bergeret to the end, for the name suggested to me as his replacement is that of Peyrou-ton. Personally I should regard such an appointment with disgust ; but honest men, with our cause at heart, think that they could work with him in such a position ; and are prepared to accept him. As his abilities—I say nothing of his character—fit him for such a post, I have no more to say.

I offer you these suggestions (I could give you plenty more names) in the firm conviction that we are delaying our victory in war by our political conduct here, and are jeopardising something infinitely more important even than that present paramount duty—our victory in peace.

I write for well over 1,000,000 serious minded people every day. They feel, I think I may say, that here we have an opportunity to show the world that we mean what we say when we say that we are fighting so that the democratic way of life may continue. At present we are neglecting that opportunity ; and it may never come again.

I have the honour to be, General  
Eisenhower,  
your obedient servant,

PHILIP JORDAN.

Some men of the Merchant Navy are creating a serious problem here. In wartime the personnel is less carefully chosen than in peace, and a number of drunken dock rats inevitably sign on ; and by their behaviour tend to bring the whole service into disrepute. Too many of these men are getting foully drunk here at night and terrorising the port quarter. They smash up bars, assault decent women and make life horrible for those who are compelled to dwell in that area. By B. of T. regulations only the civil police may arrest them and this the French are afraid to do. When brought in the maximum penalty is—except in certain cases—a five shilling fine and a night in the cells. A drunken



gutter rat was brought in to-night for knocking an old woman on the head and stealing from her. Five shillings and a night in the cells. He is wearing the honourable badge of the Merchant Navy, which he disgraced. His excuse was that he had been "through hell." This turned out to mean that he had sailed in the convoy I came in.

There are captains here afraid to go on board their own ships at night without police protection. The remedy would seem to be to put the Merchant Navy under martial law. Or to suspend all shore leave and thus leave it to the decent men to take it out of the rats.

Well, we shall start our attack on March 15. We ought, once it is under way, to be there in Tunis in a fortnight. We attack with (probably) seven divisions—three British, one French and three American, while Montgomery attacks with his four.

*February 13.*—I lunched with Harold Macmillan, whom I like and respect more every time I see him. He lives in a villa filled with warmth, light, tooled leather and odious wrought iron. It belongs to a Jewish leather merchant, whose exuberant Levantine taste has been canalised into the goitrous channels of the last Paris exhibition. Deplorable mixture.

Some of H.M.'s staff are inclined to agree with the view that Giraud's army will get into mischief; and he suggests that it might be a good idea if, say, four divisions were sent to England to train. I am in favour of this: it would give a counterpoise.

We talked until 4.30, mainly about the Beveridge Report and the concentration camps here. He thinks the former is an excellent Conservative device for which all but the cleverer elements of the Labour Party have fallen. I said I didn't care what it was: I should approve of it even if Henry Page Croft approved it. Perhaps, I wondered, I am getting conservative in my old age. Of the concentration camps he had this to say. The situation is improving, and at last, in principle, the French have given permission for the inter-allied committee to visit one of them. This, he feels, will establish a precedent; and asks me therefore to refrain from writing about them at the moment; and above all not to try to get to Colomb Bechar. I have agreed to fall in with this on condition that if matters do not progressively



improve, I shall be informed and afforded facilities for a visit. This seems the proper attitude to take.

Later I had a long talk with Charles Brunel, who was the P.W.'s nominee for Governor General. He is charming, honourable and free from all political taint—except in the eyes of the French, and that because he is our friend. He was mayor of Algiers for six years, and was thrown out by the Fascists.

He is deeply concerned about the Giraud army, also. He tells me (his experience of North Africa goes back thirty years) that Native divisions are no good against European armies unless leavened with 50 per cent Europeans. That number is not available. Which tends to confirm the theory expressed here two days ago.

The local paper refers to-day to the U.S. national anthem as "the Strangle Banner," and to the well-known song as "Ols Foth at Home," of whose title it gives this translation: "Vieux parents à la maison."

*February 14.*—General Smith, who is Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, sent for me this morning and was offensive about my "open letter." I was offensive back and after that we had a most friendly talk for an hour. I agreed in the end to withdraw my letter, and turn it into a straight article; which I have done.

Giraud is being very exigent and difficult; and the stronger his army grows the more difficult will he become. He obstructs and delays as far as he can in order to assert his silly little sovereignty and to oblige his inordinate vanity. He understands nothing of war. He issues orders without any regard to the supply problem, which he dismisses with a wave of the hand. And then gets peevish because he is forced by events to realise the impossible cannot be achieved. But there he seems to be, for good or ill. He is the choice of quarters higher than any here. Of Churchill above all. Just another little proof that the P.M. still thinks war is merely a matter of soldiers and that morals have no part in it.

Smith takes the ordinary view that Europe stinks anyway, and that all that matters are Anglo-American relations. He says he doesn't give a damn what happens in France, but he understands that we must. He doesn't see further than that. He doesn't see that our relations with France must



condition our relations with the rest of the world. We are all one of another. When the bell tolls seek not to find for whom it tolls : it tolls for thee. He envisages, as we all do, I suppose, a third Punic war, but he will not or cannot see that the only way to stop it is to cut down Fascism now, and not wait to do so until the only way to do it is by another war. It is horrible and painful that these men will not understand or learn from history. I am disturbed and weary of the struggle.

I played my yearly game of poker to-night. It cost me £7 10s.

*February 15.*—The Germans have attacked in some strength north of Gasfa, in two columns, with the intention of widening the Gabes corridor and, no doubt, of cutting off the U.S. forces between Sened and Gasfa. They have had an initial success, over-running the American artillery by the speed and strength of their first spurt. This rendered our counter-attack hopeless ; and I'm afraid there were big casualties. The enemy may well score success here for the moment for our supply problem is vexing and almost insoluble. We cannot maintain a strong force in the Tebessa area ; and that is the answer, and will remain so. The Eighth Army will have to clear this area before we have done. I do not think it will develop into anything serious, but the enemy may well advance another ten or fifteen miles, with a possible dislocation of our timetable.

X said to-day—he is a man whose reputation this war has created and who has enjoyed it—"I am so tired of the war." I admitted then what I so rarely admit even to my own heart : that I am too. Algiers wears down the spirit, and doses us all with cafard. I bought two Kent hair brushes to-day for 6s. 11d. from the officers' shop where a clerk makes out two different kinds of bills, subtracts 1 per cent discount for a reason he doesn't know ; and then adds ten per cent for freight.

I lashed out in an article to-day about the scarcity of news for the troops and urged again a special paper for them. The army say the Treasury is holding it up. Also went for the mail service. I had a letter from New York to-day posted on February 4 ! Not one from England for about two months.

*February 16.*—Oddly enough a typical Algerian day—



frustration and nothing to record, except this, told at dinner by a Republican. A man arrived in a small Texas town, and, after a few drinks at the bar of the local hotel, fell into a political argument finishing his side of it with: "Well, so far as I'm concerned, Roosevelt is a horse's a——e." He was thereupon beaten up by those present. As he left the bar, the barman called to apologise for the fracas and asked him where he was going. "X," said the victim. The barman said: "then you'd better be mighty careful of what you say. Down at X they're even better judges of horse-flesh than we are."

Met Admiral Cunningham: a Bateman cartoon of an admiral in three dimensions. A good person.

*February 17.*—The Germans, destroying or taking 150 U.S. tanks, have advanced thirty miles in the last two days. We have lost three valuable airfields and have retired to the hills north of Feriana. The whole line from the head of the Ousseltia valley is to be rectified, and we ought to hold the enemy. I still think they wish to do no more than hold the low ground to the east of the ridge. This will give them an area of manœuvre when Montgomery attacks. I am still sure that they want no more than what they have now achieved.

Met Tedder again at a cocktail party. He is lucid, quick and modern as ever. We are lucky to have him. He looks older than when I met him in Cairo a year ago, but, somehow, more alert.

I am being given a wholly undeserved reputation here. Murphy's staff are going about saying that I am trying to get him out. I am not concerned with getting rid of Murphy: I am trying merely to get a policy reversed, and if, in the process, Murphy goes, that won't mean anything to me. Jimmy Sheean was put on to me to-night to suggest I laid off Murphy. As I have never "laid on" him, I refused to understand. I met Murphy at dinner—sat opposite him—and liked him very much—a glad hander if I ever saw one, but with guts. I declined, as a guest, to be drawn.

I sat between de Rose, who is Lemaigre de Breuille's chef de cabinet, and a French major also on the chief Cagoulards staff. I denounced Lemaigre to Rose who defended him by saying that he knew nothing of the man's past and weren't the Cagoulards a fantasy. I said that we should no doubt say the same thing about Goering and the Nazis if it



suits the powers that be to make him head of the new Germany when we've conquered it.

These two men put up a most reasonable attack on the Third Republic with which I could not but agree, but where we part company is in the conception that anything, except Communism, is a better form for the future. Both argued that Giraud's army cannot possibly be used for the purposes of imposing corporatism and Fascism on France, but they could not answer when I asked for what other purpose it could be used. It is easy to be seduced by good manners and elegant knowledgeable discussions on wine and the pleasures of sensual v. intellectual passion as true happiness; but however pleasant the company of these men and of their pretty, elegant wives, they leave a bad taste in the mouth.

André Labarthe is here; that is very encouraging.

*February 18.*—Rain and terrible wind all day, and very cold. This is sunny Africa.

The German thrust in the south seems to be over, for there is now no point in their going any farther. They have taken 4,000 square miles and doubled the width of the corridor from the south. It seems that something like 50 per cent of the captured material—mainly U.S. tanks—is in perfect condition, but I do not know if there is ammunition for it. Every one is cagey on that point.

I may be going home for a day or two. If I can fix a return air passage I shall. That is agreed in London. Correspondents are beginning to arrive from the Eighth Army, having been told by Alexander that all the fighting will now be here. I doubt that somehow. We are not a good army yet: we have too little experience.

*February 19.*—I lunched with André Labarthe. I love and admire him, but I fear he is a little too much in the air. He is by far the best and finest Frenchmen of them all; and he comes here under our protection, and as such, and as an anti-de Gaullist has the possibility of immense influence. That he could be turned into a figure-head of all the democratic forces I believe, for while absolutely uncompromising he is ready to work with former enemies who have given proof of their sincerity. With Lemaigre de Breuille, even, who, at any rate, unlike Rigaud, did not work for the Germans after the fall of France.

L. is a fanatic; but so am I, and so I can find no fault



on that score. I fear, however, that he expects to find a higher degree of active patriotism than he is likely to discover ; and this may cast him down. He has a chance here, and he is grasping it with great moral courage ; but these gentlemen may turn on him suddenly and "rub him out."

I asked Roger Makins to-day if he could have police protection, for surely some one will want to shoot him soon : his ideas are big and because he is a subjective person sound like personal ambition, which they basically are not. None the less I would prophesy that in the future France he is one of the three top men. That will be by sheer force of character. "I am a liberal democrat," he says. "I am the son of a postman." He is a real Gladstonian liberal in his views on the dignity of the individual, but a technocrat when it comes to applying those principles.

There is greatness in him. What a pleasure to talk to a civilised man. I was so happy and so excited that I got a frightful headache—a sort of measure of the permanent strain here. Always, at the back there is a headache to spring forward, but that may be due purely to the lack of women here.

The battle is over : the enemy has doubled the width of the corridor to the north. This will impose a further rectification of our line, up to the head of the Ousseltia valley and then, if you ask me, nothing much more will be done.

It would be easy to exaggerate the importance of the enemy's drive, for sentiment and friendship make us worry personally about the American losses. But the truth is that they have been worth while. Men can learn to be soldiers only in battle ; and defeat is a sharper lesson than victory.

This is a gangster world. I received again to-night the cryptic Hollywood message "Piggy says to lay off Bob." Bob being Murphy *qui est plus pape que le pape*. This is insolence.

February 20.—General Paget and others passed through here yesterday on their way back from the Middle East. They tell us of their farewell to Montgomery who shook them each by the hand and shouted at them individually : "I hope you have been militarily revitalised. "Good-bye." Although highly amused at this notable eccentric, Paget said : "and the odd thing is that I was."

Eisenhower had a conference this morning. He looked



tired and sad ; I felt deeply for him, for this has been a week of great disappointment for him. He spoke sensibly and in a forthright manner of what has happened, minimising nothing and putting everything in its right proportion. He says we will have a major battle before the end ; and that there will be, perhaps, 250,000 troops against us. He says also that all of the equipment we lost in the last few days, not more than ten U.S. tanks fell intact into the enemy's hands. It has been a blow to him but not a surprise.

One of the difficulties here is to prevent Eisenhower from overworking himself : he is not strong, and if he does more than about eight hours a day gets very fatigued. His staff try to keep him within these limits, but not very successfully. The same goes for Smith, his chief of staff.

E.'s genius seems to be that of a good chairman. By his personality he has drawn together all the contending elements, British and American, who warred in the early days. He has managed to achieve something more than co-operation here : single-mindedness, and there is no doubt that he has brought his own men more and more towards our point of view. Soon there will be British officers in American tank units, which is something no one would have dreamed of two months ago. I have changed my views of this man : he has something.

This afternoon Bergeret gave a conference at which he stuffed the press up with a lot of half-truths about the concentration camps. He has a shifty eye, and even a British Intelligence officer so far forgot himself as to describe him as "the nigger in the woodpile." I said : "the trouble is there are so many niggers you lose sight of the woodpile." and this is about true.

I think this article I wrote to-night sums up fairly.

"Under pressure of world opinion General Bergeret has now made a statement on concentration camps, on French policy regarding them, and on the number and nationalities of those interned.

I asked him if I could freely visit any concentration camp and see for myself precisely what is happening in these places, whose 'bad conditions we deplore,' in Bergeret's words.

The general evaded the question by saying I could invite the Inter-Allied Commission to make me a temporary



member, and when I pointed out that the senior member of this Commission had already informed me that the French authorities alone could give permission for such a visit he had no further statement to make.

In other words his reply to my request was a categorical refusal. It can be interpreted in no other way.

Bergeret stated at the beginning of his conference that there are now 5,800 political internees into whose fate and future the Inter-Allied Commission will now inquire.

He said that at the date of the Allied landing there were 7,100 such internees. After saying that the nationals of 28 countries were still interned Bergeret's aide read this list, which, he said, comprised all political prisoners now held in the seven or eight camps in North Africa.

FRENCH COMMUNISTS, 734 (so far the only Communists released, I learn from a reliable source, are 27 Deputies.)

SPANIARDS, 3,144 ; BELGIANS, 99 ; ITALIANS, 243.

GERMANS, 219 (these are presumably anti-Fascists, as, since November 8, 1,200 male Germans and Italians between the ages of 18 and 35 have been interned.)

RUSSIANS, 156 ; CZECHS, 17 ; POLES, 218 ; "OTHERS," 336.

This list, which adds up to 5,076, was officially stated to include only 4,987.

It was added that there are 509 political internees confined for breaches of the civil code, but Bergeret admitted that some might possibly be political, convicted for technical offences.

Even allowing for the correct addition of the itemised list, the figure is still more than 200 short of the number stated by Bergeret to be interned at this moment.

Bergeret also stated that of the 1,300 men liberated as soon as the Allied landing was made, 200 were French. Among them were only 20 de Gaullists. He stated categorically that there are no de Gaullists in prison at the present time.

He also stated that as the Inter-Allied Commission was about to start its tour of investigation he had every hope that the situation would be cleared up "in a few weeks, say, four to six."

"Maybe two months," added the general's interpreter without any authorisation.



Questioned, General Bergeret said that he did not include West Africa in his statement, a country where "there are practically no camps."

Speaking of Communists in the camps, Bergeret said that they are to be given an opportunity of fighting, but that for those who cannot fight, but have "good records," other measures—which I understand means freedom—will be taken.

Of Spaniards who "were a menace to the security of the State," and were removed here at the end of Franco's civil war, Bergeret says that they are to be offered pioneer jobs in the Allied Forces if they so wish, or else will be offered civil work on the same terms as Frenchmen.

Arrangements for the transport of a number of them to Mexico have not yet reached the official stage of negotiation, but it seems likely that a move of this kind will shortly be made.

It should, I think in all fairness, be added that the problem of release is not so simple as it looks on paper.

For one thing the labour market here is so flexible that it can immediately absorb a number of unskilled Europeans.

For another thing there is the security aspect to be considered (a Security Officer is attached to the Commission.)

That is the situation to-day but, if Bergeret is correct, it should have been solved by the time the Allied Forces completed their primary mission here."

Philip Astley arrived from the M.E., and we dined. It was a great pleasure to see this dessicated statue so full of goodwill and vitality.

I am still being sniped at from up the hill for my political articles, which I take as a compliment. What they don't like is that I write in a way that gets under their skins. So they misrepresent me, saying I am backing de Gaulle for the F.O. against Giraud for the State Department. Which is deliberately to misread what I write. I detest de Gaulle. Being a modern autocrat, he is a Fascist: Giraud is merely an autocrat. I dislike them both.

Labarthe is causing concern: he is disillusioning the Gaullists here about the personal nature of their leader, which I think is a good thing, but this is annoying the British here. He must offer them something else or they will accept without question what Giraud is forcing on them.



To offer them Labarthe is not good enough—yet. Unless he has sufficient character to impose himself. Which he hasn't in the present circumstances. It will come. I introduced him to Brunel to-night.

*February 21.*—The enemy have made an important and dangerous move in the south: they have taken the Kasserine Pass from which it is possible, with the strength they seem to have, to debouch into the Le Kef plain and force us to withdraw the whole line. There is a British armoured brigade down there now to help, and this together with now baptised U.S. troops should prevent a move of any great distance. But the fact remains that the Kasserine gap is at this moment the key to the whole front. We have so little down there to hold any determined thrust, and we are not likely to get a few until the Eighth Army really moves again. The enemy is wisely wasting no time in enlarging his bridgehead, and is giving himself an extended manœuvre area. He is using his most seasoned troops: the 21st and 10th panzer divisions.

The B.B.C. to-night said that the enemy had started "an offensive." This is silly. It is a local attack with potentially serious implications launched by two battalions and about fifty tanks.

Brebner of the M.O.I.—whom, on January 21, I recommended to the Ministry should be sent here—has arrived. He has achieved something already. A paper for the troops has to be started. His visit is very welcome, for our P.R. outfit here is lamentable, and has achieved nothing in three months.

I have decided to go home for a few days and have asked for an air passage for Wednesday.

*February 22.*—The Germans have exploited their success at Kasserine, and have pushed some fourteen miles up the northern road towards Thala. The push looks like being stopped. Both sides are tired, and the weather is bad. A lot of mud. I see no reason to postpone my visit home. These thrusts are a part of waiting, but I wish we could make them. We can't, for the enemy has quite definitely outstripped our rate of build-up. Also, of course, his troops are better than ours, on account of their experience.

Poor Harold Macmillan had an air crash to-day, but is ~~not~~ badly hurt. He was attending to telegrams in bed to-



night. His Hudson crashed on taking off and caught fire. He was going to Cairo.

*February 23.*—Fighting has died down which means that the Germans have been stopped. We shall almost certainly have more attacks of this nature, but I doubt if they will ever be on a more serious scale.

I leave for London in the morning, and, with luck, shall be there on Friday. It is difficult to think of anything else.

*February 24.*—I flew to Gibraltar to-day, hedge-hopping through low cloud as far as Oran; and afterwards one of those lovely flights with sudden ecstatic moments that are a reward for much endured. More than sixty ambulances were waiting on the Oran airfield for eighteen plane loads of wounded from the Kasserine fight. The organisation was first-class and most impressive.

We left at one and were in Gibraltar before three, after sweeping over the calmest water I ever saw. Gibraltar was very strange. The strong light, reinforced by great humidity in the air, had burned all colour from the place, so that, in the bright haze through which we first saw it, the rock looked like an exceptionally competent photograph printed on glossy paper. It was two dimensional, and an unnatural grey and white, two shades that embraced everything, trees, houses, ships and sea. When we came round the corner the illusion persisted, until a sudden flame of blue, which was part of the camouflage of the big aircraft carrier here, changed everything, and you could see the colours flowing back with the rock and the town. It was though the skeleton of an old leaf were clothed suddenly with the rich life of spring. We came down on the new runway. The race-course has gone: it is a trick arcodrome that requires skill and judgement beyond the ordinary from pilots who land there. It is just long enough for a big bomber—but only just: and when you see one taking off, you are sure it will crash. But they don't—any longer.

The first thing I heard was that there would be no transport for England, and that the lists were full for several days. I felt like bursting into tears, but suddenly met X who has some influence and my hopes rose. Even he was powerless, so summoning up what philosophy remains to me after nearly four months of great strain, I came up to the Rock Hotel, prepared to rest, and not worry. Later a message



came that there was, after all, transport. My strings had pulled to some effect. A car came at 9.30 and drove me to some mysterious slipway, where I was informed that owing to bad weather in Britain we were to wait for twenty more hours. I came back and re-read Trent's Last Case, which wears as well as Cleopatra did.

This is an odd place. There is only a desultory blackout ; and women in evening dress dance at nights with officers to a not-bad band. Only the navy makes any attempt to dress for dinner. Anything further from a beleaguered fortress the surface could not show.

The harbour and roads are crammed with shipping. R.C. tells me—and he ought to know—that the Germans were quite convinced that in November we intended to invade Dakar, and not the north. They were all set out to reply with an immediate occupation of all the North African airfields, but would not have sent a land force, believing that all we intended was to better our Atlantic traffic safety. They would have taken over the administration ; and among those whom they would have used were two-thirds of the men in power to-day.

The Kasserine battle has swung in our favour, as it was certain to do. If I had not thought that I would not be on my way home. I bought Stella Benson's *Mundos* to-night : a glorious book.

There are U.S. submarines heré, and a lot of freighters. We ought to clear North Africa by May.

February 25.—*Mundos* is better at second reading than it was at first. How I should like to have known that woman ; she had that rare detached wisdom which the best of women hardly ever achieve. When they do it is purer, more serene and more detached than men achieve. It is gifted with powerful eyes. I know only one woman as wise as Stella Benson must have been ; and I count her among the treasures of my life.

To-day we got as far as the launch when the trip was cancelled. The disappointment was so great that it did not hurt, and by the time the ache did begin I was ready for it. Strong head winds in the Bay of Biscay would have made our arrival unlikely. So we are better here, looking at the bright lights of Algeciras across the bay, knowing that the sun will shine to-morrow.



I lunched with one of the army's psychiatrists, who, with good backing in high places, is doing an excellent officers' selection job in the teeth of much obstruction from equally high places. He says there is still much nepotism in the army; and against that the selection boards must struggle harder than against any other obstruction. But at the same time, he praises the W.D.—and in particular Ronald Adam—for having so quickly developed the principle of selection boards once the fundamental idea was accepted. All the old weaknesses of selection have not yet been abolished, of course, but proved capacity for democratic leadership is at last the criterion. Like most young scientists he has the blind spot: the Soviet Union. To this "problem" he declines to bring a scientific mind. He will see only his vision of it, as he wants it to be and as propaganda has presented it to him; he does not wish to know the truth about it.

He, and so many like him, imagine it to be the scientists' paradise. It is, of course, the opposite: even a Bunsen burner is thought of in political terms.

I met an old W.O. friend to-day, who says Croft so disliked my ABCA number on Russia that he wanted what he called "the other side" presented. This "other side" would not have been remotely connected with facts, but with what I suppose I must call Croft's mind. I presented facts with, I hope, the absolute minimum of essential human bias. I am not a scientist.

Croft, the erstwhile darling of the Bournemouth landladies, is my nomination for a model of what we do not ever want in public life again.

I wish I were a superstitious man: I would pray for departure to-morrow. Unless we get off quick I shall have no time to get home.

*February 26.*—Gibraltar seems to me a model of efficiency: it is as though it had done its job so well that it can afford the manifold relaxations it enjoys.

We took off at 10.40 this evening and, because of a sudden storm nearly ran into the rock. It was bumpy for the first hour but is all right now. This Sunderland is going home for a refit: she came in here from Freetown on three engines.

Buckly, just back from Spain, says that if you have



money there you can feed better than anywhere in the world. In Algeciras an egg cost 4s. 6d. : in Gibraltar 1s. : in North Africa 1½d. : a comment on the idiocy of men.

*February 27.*—We arrived home after flying against strong head winds. Day broke while we were on the level of Brest, but we saw nothing but a roaming Catalina. Breakfast in the aircraft was steak and chips ! Afterwards we ran into fog, and so, very low down, into this place. There is no train to London until this evening.

The news is what it ought to be : the German thrust at Thala has properly and naturally failed ; and they are trying others. All will fail.

*February 28.*—By sleeper to London, and so home, where we sat out in the sun and had our drinks before lunch. We do that very rarely at Thiber.

Everybody who wants to understand war should look at a relief globe of Europe : the way into Germany is through Roumania and Bulgaria. Our proposed immediate attack on Italy will not be our road into Germany. It will merely bring our soldiers to the fortress walls.

*March 7.*—Lisbon. We flew here to-day by the civil air line in great comfort, to find Carnival in full swing. All the lights are up, and the children, with heavily rouged faces, are dressed either in traditional costume or in medieval fantasies. It is all very lovely and remote. In London I have been too busy and going to bed too late to keep a regular flow of relevant information in this diary. About six appointments a day, and a party every night.

I find the interested British as bad as the Americans, only in the reverse way. If you attack the Giraud administration, they say de Gaulle is worse, whereas the Americans, in the former case, think you've been put up to defend de Gaulle by the F.O.

But none the less our all too short visit has achieved something, I think, and been worth while, for we were able to take it direct to ministerial level. We went home to do what we could to improve press communications from the front to Algiers and from Algiers to London. As we have only a few weeks before the battle begins we could not propose the ideal solutions—solutions that could have been achieved months ago if the proper authorities had not chucked up the sponge. To the Minister we proposed a



daily service by Hurricane or Spitfire from an advanced operational airfield to Algiers, and, if there is time, additional portable high-speed transmitters. From Algiers to London we proposed a higher priority on the cables, suggesting that operational routine should come below press.

I had long talks with Richard Law and some of his officials, and T. gave a lunch party to which he invited about fifteen M.P.s to whom I talked for half an hour, on the danger of Giraud's coloured army. I found no policy in London: every one I met is bewildered and wants to know what on earth they can "do" with de Gaulle. He is Frankenstein's monster; and we are Frankenstein. To the French he is a sort of mixture between Mr. Gladstone and Joan of Arc—because they do not know him. And now the problem is how to keep the legendary de Gaulle alive, and to prevent the live de Gaulle from killing the imaginary one.

The greatest pleasure was waiting in London. Joseph Kessel and a friend have escaped to London. They dined with us and brought Grenier, the fine Communist deputy, who is making brilliant use of de Gaulle at the moment.

*March 8.*—Gibraltar. I dined with the Governor to-night; and found Samuel Hoare there, which spoiled my pleasure. The room was full of acquaintances, for this place has become a sort of Clapham Junction of the war. Friends from Moscow, Lagos, Cairo, and London were there.

*March 9.*—The Governor took me all over the defences to-day: they are miraculous. Gibraltar could now hold out for a two years' siege. I wrote this about the new defences and the censor cut out all mention of the airport—because the Spaniards don't like it. Franco seems to be dictating our policy!

*March 11.*—Back in Algiers, which is as wet and cold as ever. Giraud is to make an important speech on Sunday, in which, Roger Makins tells me, he will announce at least one important change in his administration, and a considerable number of liberalising moves, all of which will, of course, require deeds to prove them. I wrote an article to-day forecasting the disappearance of Bergeret, but pointing out that what we want to dispose of are the 'eminences grises,' de Breuille, Rigaud and so on. It was by no error that the Vichy anti-Jewish decrees were published in the Official Gazette: the thing had happened twice before



in the last month and no action was taken because the decrees did not happen to affect matters on which there is popular feeling.

The trouble about these pronouncements of importance is that they are made too late to enable us to ponder them before writing about them, so that snap judgments are inevitable.

The war is still fairly quiet. Rommel is said to have lost a quarter of his tank forces last week. This should help us very greatly if we can be quick. But our attack may be delayed for Alexander, I'm told, was appalled by the chaos he found, and by the lack of organisation. I got up at six to fly to a press conference but the weather was too bad to take off.

*March 13.*—All butchers' shops have been closed to-day until further notice. The Economic Council here makes no bones about it, but states that there is no meat because the demands of the army on both food and transport have been excessive and out of all proportion to what the economy of the country can stand. It appeals for the return by the army of even worn-out vehicles which are, it says, a vital support of a reasonable economy. This confirms the reflections which I have been writing on Giraud's mad military schemes (300,000 men he is aiming at in the shortest possible time, and nothing, not even the hunger of the people, to stand in the way).

There will be a further food crisis in about six weeks, this time bread. There is plenty of grain in the country but the big producers, who are closely allied with the senior members of the administration, are hoarding and holding out for famine prices. Another relevant and determining factor is the shortage of transport, another sign of military folly.

A big operation is planned for next week, I hear : it sounds as though the Americans are to drive for Gasfa, and then Gabes. All their losses have been made good, and they have been heavily reinforced from Morocco. They have a new local commander, General Patton. Most of these troops have been trained in Morocco ; but I much fear they may be too inexperienced to fight alone. This operation should be the beginning of the end, and the enemy will fight this time as hard as he knows.



*March 14.*—Giraud made his speech to-day. He promised a restoration of the Republic as soon as France is liberated, and added a number of local ameliorations such as the immediate repeal of all the Vichy laws. An unexceptionable speech—but! It is a big “but,” for we have had lots of words since we came here, and few deeds; and until we have some deeds it would be a mistake to suppose that world opinion has won. Although Murphy’s office assures us that all the members of the administration support the speech in principle, this is inconceivable, for if they do, they are Vicars of Bray in the nth degree and, in their hearts, cannot possibly do so. While they remain there is always the danger of a palace revolution at the last moment, for Giraud’s hold over the people is exiguous to say the least. If he will dismiss Bergeret, Nogues and several generals together with their ‘*eminences grises*’ he will give proof that he not only means what he says but is determined to carry out his promises. That is the acid test. It is also the only hope of union, for none can expect de Gaulle to come in while a gang such as still exists retains power.

Giraud is a very bad speaker. He spoke this evening at a gathering of refugees from Alsace and Lorraine, a truly pathetic affair, incredibly badly organised and staged. Two little girls made speeches of welcome, at the end of which he kissed them. I could not resist whispering “just like dear Hitler,” to my neighbours. What was moving about the occasion was that it bore all the marks of having been organised by defeated and plundered men in a brave but not very successful attempt to put defeat behind them.

*March 15.*—I flew to Tebessa to-day. The Gafsa attack is due to start at any minute, mainly, it seems, to try and draw German tanks away from the 8th Army so that they may smack the more successfully. The attack would have begun to-day had the Germans not last night put 70 tanks near to Kesserine Pass, for reasons not yet clear. American intelligence says that the enemy has 190,000 men, 350 tanks and 250 fighter aircraft in Tunisia at the moment. The last two figures are probably too high.

The more I hear about the Gafsa attack the more I begin to believe that there is a lot of ballyhoo about it, designed in part to help American military prestige—a usually foolish reason for conducting an operation. They have got every correspon-



dent down here and, of course, have failed to provide adequate transmission. In the meantime Medjez, in the north, is in considerable danger, and unless we can attack first, in some strength (a brigade is suggested, but I doubt if this would be enough) we may lose it. It begins to look as though the main attack has been postponed for at least a fortnight. Alexander has completely re-formed his divisions, a process not yet completed.

*March 16.*—The Gasfa attack begins to-morrow, and will go on to Maknassy. I doubt if the Germans will divert any tanks in the initial stages from defending themselves against a potentially far stronger enemy. The Americans will attack with two divisions (one armoured) with two divisions in reserve. Gasfa is to-morrow's objective.

A. told me this story to-day. He was lunching in the St. James's Club last week. At the next table two Blimps were becoming somewhat fidgetty, so his host asked him what they wanted. They wanted cheese. "Why, then," said A.'s host, "do you not ask the waitress?" The Blimp turned on him and said: "Ask the waitress! Ask the waitress! Ask waitresses for cheese nowadays and all they say is 'Beveridge, Beveridge.'"

Giraud is here in Tebessa. He says he is about to sack Bergeret and Rigaud. He has been about to sack them for so long, but somehow he seems more positive now. He is also to ask de Gaulle to visit him.

*March 17.*—Up at seven and drove 90 miles with about one hour's wait into Gasfa which the enemy abandoned at about 11 a.m. The mines were cleared adequately by noon and the infantry and tanks were streaming in without a casualty at 12.30. We got in about two, after as peaceful and pleasant a drive as ever I took. Not a single enemy plane in the sky all day.

All the Jews in the town have been pillaged by the Arabs acting under German encouragement. Even the doors and windows have been stolen. It is horrible.

Although not tested by fire the United States troops impressed me: they seemed to have learned a lot; and they moved up with precision and logic. Their road-making and mending units were at work on the mine craters by one this afternoon; and we drove in on a cleared by-pass without trouble. I never knew anything less like war until a signals



lorry hit a mine and blew one of its front wheels off. No one was hurt. Nearly all the mines dug up so far have been British, captured probably by the Germans in France or at Tobruk.

The enemy will probably try and stand about 12 miles east of here at El Guettar.

General Patton, who commands the American 2nd Corps, said to-day that it had all been too easy and that he is worried. I don't think he need be. I saw Eisenhower and Alexander at dinner, looking pleased with life.

*March 18.*—Tremendous rain all day held up the operation by slackening its intended pace. The enemy has evacuated the strongly defensible position of El Guettar, outside Gafsa, where they could have made a stand at little cost. It is protected by marsh and mountain. They will certainly stand a few miles farther back unless they think—which I'm sure they don't—that the Americans can be lured to the sea, and then chopped off. The 8th Army must be patently ready to make such a venture too risky.

I went to Alexander's H.Q. to-day in the forest north of Tebessa, and talked with his chief of staff, who expects the enemy to do all possible to protect Maknassy, for if that goes the retreat corridor for the Afrika Korps will be too narrow. He is prepared for a counter-attack by a complete armoured division. The rain will slow things up: yesterday's dry wadis are rivers to-day and roads are being washed away. It is incessant, fierce and devilish cold rain; and I think the troops would like it better if they could make contact quicker.

In our own sector in the north the enemy is making some progress and I hear the Djebel Abiod-Beja road is under fire. If this is so it is serious and means that Tamara is in danger and that between the northern road and the Medjez-Beja road the enemy is all over the hills. Alexander's regrouping has temporarily weakened all our positions in the north, and there is fundamentally nothing to worry about. I shall go and see.

*March 19.*—Drove north to Thibar and 5th Corps to find that Tamara has gone. Medjez seems—and on the map is—in real danger, but corps are confident that all is well. I begin to doubt it. If we cannot hold what we must hold if our final assault is not to be over delayed it is time that all



the new material we keep hearing about was in place. And it doesn't seem to be, for we would not willingly give an inch of ground in the north. There can be no *strategic* withdrawal from our present holdings. If we lost Beja we would have to go back as far as the hills beyond Ghardimaou. We are, at the moment, almost back in the positions where we first made contact with the enemy in November : Beja and Djebel Aboid.

What I loathe and hate most about war is the lack of privacy. How much luckier we are than the men, I know ; but to-night is the first night since I landed that I have had a bedroom to myself.

*March 20.*—I drove up to Medjez-el-Bab to see the Guards' brigade ; and had tea with them. The situation had deteriorated badly there, and almost unnoticed. You can no longer approach the town along the road from Oued Zarga, for since Christmas the enemy has slowly but very surely been creeping along the hill tops north of the road and now commands it, just as he now commands the Djebel Abiod-Beja road. He comes down and mines it at night ; and during the day sits over it with a machine gun. You can now only get into Medjez by a back road.

Nobody seems to take this very seriously, but in fact it is serious, for we are almost back to where we started from in November ; and it will be a tough job to clear the Germans from the hills before we get into Tunis. The enemy has part of the 10th panzer division up there and may attack at any moment. He is short of artillery. If he had any up there he could push us out of Medjez to-morrow.

Spring has come at last, in spite of rain. The corn here is knee-high : wild flowers, mainly marigolds, cover the country with their golden buttons, and the storks are nesting. In early evening when the wind died away, the air was heavy with perfume that weighted your eyelids. In the town untended gardens are becoming wild, and long creepers move over smashed houses, hiding their ugly scars.

*March 21.*—I flew to Algiers this morning for I want to be here when de Gaulle comes. Sidney Bernstein has arrived to "look into" the film situation ; and we dined this evening in the black market. You can eat as well as anywhere in the world here if you know where to go and will pay for what you get. We had grilled steak, even though, officially,



there is no meat in Algeria. Robert Sherwood comes tomorrow.

*March 22.*—The Americans took Maknassy without a fight this morning. This—because it is one of the key positions in south Tunisia—argues either a hope on Rommel's part that he can hold the 8th Army as long as he likes (which we all doubt here and give the Mareth positions 24 hours) or the real end of the Tunisian campaign, except the holding of a larger Tobruk in the north, with consequent deleterious effects on our naval warfare.

Z. in the Intelligence Corps tells me that the Germans have constructed something like 100 wooden jetties on the shallow beaches between Sfax and Tunis from which they could embark men quickly with small boats. If they do so it is going to be awkward for us to explain this evacuation away, having claimed Dunkirk as a victory which it was.

*March 23.*—The 8th Army has cracked through the Mareth positions. To-night our tanks are pouring through and Gabes has virtually fallen unless the enemy has a real counterpunch ready for us which he probably has.

I am inclined to think that the battle of Tunis is nearly over, for if the 8th Army can cut off Rommel's armour in the south (and it looks as though this were possible) the battle would be over, except always for the northern Tobruk.

*March 24.*—I flew back to Tunisia to-day. We hedge-hopped all the way and it was frightfully rough. A few days at the front, in case the two armies join up, and then back to Algiers to see de Gaulle is the programme I have mapped out, but the times are too uncertain for a planned life.

In the Mareth positions the enemy has wiped out our bridgehead, and the battle, bloody, fierce and incessant, goes on. That we shall win it I do not doubt, but until we get further details there is no point speculating on its time schedule.

We are, at long last, moving much infantry into the north where we have been wasting the commandos (one unit has only 153 men left) and parachutists as ordinary infantry. Highly specialised infantry are needed for this northern hill war, and we simply haven't got them: it seems indeed that something is lacking in our training, for the enemy are better at it than we are.

The Commandos and parachutists are annoyed and



distressed. Naturally. They are not equipped with the necessary modern material, for their job is to travel and fight light. When they act as infantry they do not receive equipment adequate for their purpose ; and they suffer. We shall, with all the new material now coming up, however, attack soon, but we are woefully short of armour, some one at home having suddenly decided not to send out the proposed armoured division until it is equipped with Shermans. A bit late in the day.

To travel up by air it is now necessary to have a travel order. It is distributed as follows : three copies to me, one to the Public Relations file and one to the general file. I have my three copies. No one asked to see it from the time I received it until I had ended my journey. Five pieces of paper wasted.

*March 25.*—I motored 240 miles to-day, to Gafsa ; and now, at 10.40 the night is hideous with tremendous American convoys bringing up supplies.

The U.S. infantry have done a magnificent job here, behaving with all the guile and coolness of battle-hardened men. They have been put to the supreme test—allowing tanks to get through their lines and firing from only 100 yards—and have passed with 100 marks out of 100. They have knocked out five Mark VI's and about 30 smaller tanks at El Guettar alone.

To-day has otherwise been quiet, but however unspectacular the U.S. rôle at the moment it is vital, for it has drawn off an entire German armoured division (the 10th) from the 8th Army front : and is holding it.

Alexander's C.G.S. says that the 8th Army have suffered because they came to a wadi across which they could not get the anti-tank guns ; but that the hold-up is temporary. It may be necessary to reinforce the brilliant outflanking movement of the N.Z. division towards El Hamma and drive through from there to Gabes, but it is hoped (and believed) that this will not be necessary.

A glorious, hot day : I was made drowsy by the perfume of miles of wild narcissi. This is written by candlelight in a half bombed house where I am living in greater comfort than it sounds.

*March 26.*—Divisional H.Q. is in a ravishing oasis some miles east of this place (Gafsa). You drive along a



road jammed with traffic for about 12 miles and then turn off into a hidden world whose walls and ceiling are the trunks and fronds of date palms. Its mud roads, baked to-day and hurling back the hot sunlight lead into a garden on to whose rich earth the plum trees to-day were showering their blossoms. Peach blossom was at its best, and the first leaves are bright on the fig trees. In the little irrigated squares there are broad beans, garlic, carrots and corn. The beans are perfect for eating : about half the minimum size at which British gardeners will begin, daringly, to pluck.

These are General Allen's H.Q. He is a little man with deep, merry eyes, who has been charged with the defence of Gafsa. He has no other mission. He is determined to fulfil it, and I think he will. His troops are admirably disposed on high ground some miles east, overlooking a plain sown with wild flowering mustard, bright as sawdust in a circus ring before the show starts. In this plain are half a score of damaged German tanks, including two Mark VI's, that legendary flop. They looked like dead elephants.

The front was quiet to-day, but behind there is tremendous activity. The 9th U.S. infantry division has been driving into place all day, heralding an inevitable attack. Jeeps are not in flocks : they are in clouds. It is told here that an Arab denounced three German spies dressed in American uniform and when asked how he knew they were spies said "Because they were walking and had no jeep." It could almost be true.

But the strangest thing to-day was seeing a typewriter at work in the oasis, where until history flung El Guettar on to the world's retina, life has not changed at all since Moses led the Israelites from Egypt.

High winds, dust storms and very restricted visibility kept air activity to a minimum.

*March 27.*—The dust storm has gone on all day, and through it a great tide of men and formidable equipment has flowed east to take up their positions for the attack towards Gabes which begins to-morrow. We had a long talk with General Allen to-night : the little man seems very confident. I think he has every reason to be : his men are in the very best of form and he has what good judges call the best artillery in the world. It is astonishingly accurate, varied and powerful. What we call "guns" the Americans



call "rifles." This great force of fine men fills the air with their confidence.

I drove through the mountains to-day into a wide valley beyond which lies the sea. Yesterday the enemy disputed passage into it, but to-day all was quiet, except for the whine of shells overhead, coming from our guns. We went a long way forward but drew no fire, so we came back, under the shadow of Bou Hamran, a village on an isolated crag, which is now an advanced O.P. It was very lovely and romantic. All through the pass the Italians had made preparations to stay a long time; they had even brought bath tubs up there!

The pass is narrow, leading to Bou Hamran, and the mountains rise almost perpendicularly from a floor carpeted with wild blue stocks, some violet and opium poppies. They are like islands soaring from rich southern seas. And then they slope away into a wide valley, and as though through a sea mist there are distant hills on either side. The valley has no sound but that of birds. There are German trucks in it, blown on mines laid by American patrols. An American captain from California took us on patrol: a fine, simple character, inspired by a sense of duty. Would that more men had that transparent honesty of heart. You felt at ease with him.

Some one has put up a large notice board on the road outside Gafsa. "The First Army Welcomes the 8th Army." It should not be long now. The news from the south is that the 8th Army is pushing forward, that the Germans are moving north and that the New Zealanders virtually control El Hamma. The Americans are to push forward along the Gabes road until they control the junction of the El Hamma road. It will be no easy job.

*March 28.*—The 9th American Infantry division attacked this morning by "uncorking" most of their artillery on a tough mountain strong point. They dropped 7000 pounds of steel and H.E. on it in one minute. Then it was quiet. By attacking, these fine and splendid men took on a very difficult task, for the enemy—mixed German and Italian—hold commanding positions on each side of the road, in which are hidden many mortars and no little artillery.

I watched the battle all morning from an advanced O.P. It was a ringside seat. American artillery, behind us, fired



incessantly, both at batteries and O.P.s. One of the latter on the summit of a high peak sometimes looked like an erupting volcano, as flames and smoke spurted from the gashed rock. Sometimes anti-personnel (which seems to be the modern name for shrapnel) burst in little black clouds over enemy batteries, and then they were silent for a while.

On the range to the south of the Gabes road the Americans were particularly gallant. Against mortar fire so heavy that for some time they could not rescue their wounded, they scaled the heights, never being able to scratch any cover in the bare rock. They will probably be able to silence the mortars to-morrow, if indeed the enemy do not withdraw them to-night. By morning it is probable that we shall hold the T junction of the El Hamma road.

Altogether to-day the 1st division advanced about four miles. It was a slow process, for the mortar-borne infantry would go forward like ships leaving long wakes behind them, but of dust; and then, when the mortar fire became intense they darted back. A kind of sad flotsam on eddying currents. Their supporting self-propelled guns kept up an incessant fire. Tanks in quantity were waiting in reserve, in case the enemy used the alleged 70 he has in a gorge up the far end of Djebel Chemsî.

About four miles were covered in this way. We followed up on foot this afternoon and were able to walk with ease and in comparative safety into the morning's battle area. I went to see a blown up Mark VI., the great flop. Its gun had been splayed so that it looked like a feathered ornament on a woman's hat. Some of our artillery had been brought up, too, and we sat in the sun by a 105 and had a needed rest. It was hot, and danger is fatiguing.

This is a bloody and fierce battle, and the U.S. troops are doing better than they used to. Their morale is above 100 per cent, as it were. Alexander and Patton were up to-day, looking pleased. The former says that things are going well with the 8th Army.

I had a letter from four sergeants in the Middle East, complaining, because in an article of high praise for the Poor Bloody Infantry I had said that a lot of them were stupid. This they deny. If they are right the 8th Army must be composed of Gods. People will snatch phrases from their



context. It is a universal habit, in which, of course, from time to time, we all find it useful to indulge.

*March 29.*—Our southernmost bombing line at 9 a.m. was Gabes : it had moved north by 11. So ends the Mareth Line. The battle for Tunis is about to begin. 18th Army Group is very nervous, none the less ; and yesterday's air of confidence has become one of uncertainty. This is natural for when one recognisable solid obstacle has been disposed of, there are only uncertainties in front. It is extraordinary how the enemy has managed to keep the moral initiative ever since our first check at Tebourba.

There is talk of an enemy stand at Sousse, but I doubt it, somehow. I think he will make straight for Tunis, and we ought to be able to nip him off before he gets there, if these five months have meant anything.

The Americans have made a little advance in this hellish country, where the enemy is holding them up with a few well handled mortars in the hills. Obviously they will do all possible to stand here until the main German force from Gabes has passed north. The front was as noisy to-day as yesterday, but the eye could see little difference. The first squadron of fighters came in to-day on the newly made ground. We are quicker at making advanced landing grounds than we used to be.

American Intelligence to-night says that the campaign is going to be long. They are very pessimistic ; but they are tired out with overwork and worried about the hold-up.

*March 30.*—We must face up to it : although the Americans are pushing through towards Gabes, the enemy has so held them up—and still is holding them up—that their victory when it comes will have failed to achieve its purpose, which was to open the way for a drive on Rommel's right flank. It will have gone by the time they reach the place where it is to-day.

For perhaps the first time in the history of modern war men to-day were able to watch a battle from beginning to end, to watch the forces gathering, deploying, attacking and going through. I was one of those men, for I sat on a hill-top overlooking the wide plain and I could see everything that happened there. All morning the Americans put up a barrage from the batteries behind and in front of us ; and there can have been no minute when shells were



not flying over. You don't actually *hear* shells going over, but your ears *feel* them ; and you *feel* the sound of silk being shaken in the wind. At 12 a vast quantity of armour, of self-propelled guns and tank busters (perhaps 100 of each) were massed behind us, and they came through the low sandy pass into the open plain. This tidal wave rolled out over the plain. It was empty at one moment, except for the advanced batteries and the shattered vehicles of the battle last week and then suddenly it seemed full. The enemy shelled the road just below us and hit a jeep. Its occupants were running for shelter when the burst came and one went flat and you knew he was dead, while the others crumpled in a co-ordinated way and then got up and ran. It was like seeing animated dolls knocked over. You knew when the shells were coming because suddenly men would drop for no reason and then a moment after the burst came near them ; and they would get up and go, more slowly than they need have done.

At 1.30 the leading tanks went over a small fold and dashed for the pass through the hills beyond. The right flank was held up by a superb mortal barrage, but the left crashed through what at times must have seemed a wall of shells. When the enemy opened up he let them have everything he'd got and the ground rose about them in evanescent walls that looked solid for a moment and then became dust and smoke. One Sherman was hit. A halo of smoke, blue as periwinkles, hung round it for a few moments and then flames came from it, bright as scarlet flowers in a slum, and its crew went on firing with vigour. They jumped out just before it exploded. There was none of the usual confusion of battle ; the whole was as orderly as a rehearsed play and not as good, for it aroused no pity in those who watched it. In a peculiar way this fearful thing lacked all dramatic essence, yet it was one of the most dramatic spectacles that human eyes have ever witnessed.

To-night the right flank is still held up, but the left has gone forward to its first objective, the Kibili road junction with the Gabes road, so important yesterday, so much less to-day, so much less to-morrow. The enemy still have the junction under fire.

We went up the road a long way towards the tank battle but could see no more. We came across a British Military



Policeman, dressed as though for church parade. His duty was to go behind the tanks and direct first elements of the 8th Army to their dump here in Gafsa. He is a trifle early, so we sent him back.

My chauffeur caught ("rescued" he says) a turkey wandering unhappily on the battlefield. He wrapped it in a tarpaulin and tied it to the top of the car. As some recompense for this kindness the bird laid him an egg on the way home!

*March 31.*—It is not time to pass judgment on this battle. An American colleague to-day calls it "the failure of a mission," and I fear he is right. No more progress has been made to-day, and now the whole purpose of the battle has gone into history. Rommel's right flank has withdrawn beyond reach of these three American divisions; and the victory is his even though the battle continues, for he has achieved what he has set out to achieve. That a handful of men and guns should have held up three divisions (one of them armoured) is a comment on the terrain rather than a criticism of the troops. The Americans in the field have fought magnificently but they were badly directed. You cannot clear bandits out of a house by making a demonstration of strength in front of and beyond it. You must attack the house, room by room, using tactics dictated by the enemy. If you don't he will fire on you and murder you. The Germans here are conducting an extremely skilful guerrilla war, imposed on them by the nature of the ground. Of guerrilla war they have made a science, and instead of operating in independent units they have created a series of interlocking defence positions, whose power can only be destroyed by the elimination of two neighbouring positions. In no other way can a wide enough gap be forced. So far the Americans have captured only one of the wards in this lock; they have not forced the door.

There was much air activity by the enemy over the frontal areas; and they bombed the El Guettar oasis in the hope presumably of knocking out our artillery. They didn't. This almost complete freedom of action argues that all our air forces are doing a complete job in more important areas.

*April 1.*—The enemy bombed us during the night. Noisy but little damage. They are looking for the 8th Army



dump which has been made ready near here. It includes thousands of tons of petrol, not yet very well dispersed. No further progress of any kind all day ; the only change at the front was heavily increased aerial activity by both sides. German dive-bombers came over this morning and nearly killed the Corps Commander. They killed his A.D.C. and knocked out a number of guns. This seems to dispose of Air Vice-Marshal Conyngham's statement the other day that "the dive-bomber as a weapon of war has ceased to exist." The R.A.F. are always saying this, and they protest too much. Up to the end of last June the navy had lost 36 ships in the Mediterranean alone by dive bombers.

We live in a charming little house in the middle of Gafsa. It had a garden full of broad beans and nettles ; and a small combination orchard and vineyard below in which we have pitched two tents. Before the Italians left they hacked out all the plumbing, tore down the electric wires and smashed every window and door. Wantonness. If they really wished to inconvenience the incoming Allies they should have wrenched off the window shutters, then we could have had no black-out.

*April 2.*—Still no progress. The Germans have counter-attacked with some tanks, but the 1st infantry division, which is good, should have no trouble with them. We are all fed-up with this missed opportunity. It is no fault of the men on the ground : they are fine. The fault is high up, for this was to have been a prestige show to rehabilitate the former Gafsa reverse. There is no sillier form of military enterprise. Much bombing again last night.

*April 3.*—Still no change. I went foraging in the hills and for half a pound of tea bought two chickens and for twenty cigarettes, five eggs. The desert was sweet to-day : a warm wind from the south made you think the sea was just over the horizon. From the north comes word that the 6th armoured division is to attack and take Kairouan in 'four days' time. They have their Shermans now ; and have been training for a week or more. If all goes well they may go on to Sousse and try and hold that with the Guards' brigade who are attached to them.

*April 4.*—I drove north to Thibar. Spring has come to the northern valleys and in the clear and lovely air of this afternoon we saw the land at its rich best. Very green and



clear cut, so that you felt you could see individual pebbles from a distance. This is the week of the year when the cypress has an adolescent grace and is full, not for once of ancient austerity, but of youth. The skies were washed clear and the clouds were so still that they moved hardly more rapidly than the sun. The attack is on : it is scheduled for Tuesday.

*April 5.*—I was reading in Spinoza this morning ; and found these words : “ I at length determined to search out whether there were not something truly good and communicable to man, by which his spirit might be affected to the exclusion of all other things : yea, whether there were anything, through the discovery and acquisition of which I might enjoy continuous and perfect gladness for ever . . . love directed towards the eternal and infinite feeds the mind with pure joy, and is free from all sadness. Wherefore it is greatly to be desired and to be sought after with our whole might.”

On this “ breakfast ” I walked about six miles through the fields. The corn is now thigh-high and if you stoop down it shelters you from the wind, so that you can smell summer coming. I found wild snapdragons, lilies, violets, vetch, marigolds, plump yellow daisies and a score of beautiful flowers whose names I do not know. Most of them very simple flowers, and the lovelier for that. From the top of a hill we could see a landscape some forty miles long and about fifteen miles wide. From one end to the other it is green. When the Spitfires take off from the valley their wheels are tangled in flowers.

Cattle have been driven back to the valley ; and where no corn grows there are now oxen and sheep, but very few goats. The mountains are green to the last whipped ridge, where the rock has withstood centuries of gale and rain and now hangs over the sloping pastures below like a sounding board over a great pastoral pulpit. This hot morning is pure joy. Is free from all sadness, too, when you can surrender to its drowsy magic. The storks are here, nesting again, and the air is full of birds on their way north. There is no news.

*April 6.*—I drove north to-day to Sedjanane, through lovely cold hills and hot valleys from which the dwindling rivers are fast running away. Soon their beds will be dry.



Beyond Djebel Abiod, which has been knocked all to hell and gone, the world of scarcely finished battle begins ; it is a world infinitely more macabre than that of battle, for there is a smell of dead flesh, the earth is untidy and pitted, smashed and burned cars and tanks litter the roadside (all enemy) and all the careful disorder of nature is profaned with the carcasses of discarded implements : shell cases, petrol tins, mines and an infinite quantity of damp, charred cardboard. In the mined fields the corn is growing.

We went up to call on the parachutists. They live in a corkwood just this side of Sedjanane, beyond a graveyard where our men and Germans lie side by side. Lilies are planted morbidly on the graves. The Germans go to war with neat little crosses in trim equipment : ours are made from ration boxes ; and are the more moving for that. The Germans, during the time they occupied this area last month, buried no dead, neither their own nor ours, so the air here is beastly with the sweet smell of decay.

The Parachutists are discontented and furious. They have been used as infantry since the middle of December without adequate equipment ; and they have been in the line uninterruptedly since January 26. Over and over again they have saved the day against forces twice and three times as great as they ; and they get no credit for it, for we are not allowed to mention that they are in action at all, although the enemy knows it perfectly well. This silence about them adds to their really serious discontent.

There can only be three reasons for this ban on mentioning them. (1). That questions would certainly be asked in the House about the way their talents have been wasted and about how they have been misused. There was some reason for this in the early days, but there has been none since the beginning of February. (2). That the truth would discourage recruiting, and (3). That somebody's reputation would suffer.

Several of us have written to Alexander to-day, asking that the ban should be taken off.

Flavell, the commander, who is nearly 50 and has some 20 jumps to his credit, is a shipbroker in private life, but has all the airs of a competent life-long professional soldier. He got the M.C. and two bars in the last war. He told me of one of his men, when his unit was surrounded and seemed



hopelessly cut off the other day, jumped from a slit trench while under fire, with a tray of captured German grenades. He went from trench to trench shouting, "Cigars, chocolates, cigarettes," handing them out. The enemy fled.

Since January 26 the parachutists have captured more German prisoners than they have men when at full strength.

They rank with the Hampshires as the heroes of this campaign ; and it is high time they were recognised as such. We owe them much.

*April 6 and 7.*—The attack by the 78th division was timed to begin at 3.50 on the morning of the 7th. Its immediate purpose is to clear the Germans off the hills that lie north and west of Medjez, in order to open up the road to Tebourba, to threaten Mateur (whose fall would put an end to resistance in the north) and to try out the extreme perimeter defences of Tunis itself.

I drove out at 5 p.m. so as to have time to choose a vantage point before dark ; and eventually was offered a high peak overlooking the whole area of battle. Then we cooked a dinner of eggs and bacon in the blacked-out car and settled down for the night.

As soon as the new moon set (it was only a 25 minutes moon) hundreds of infantry marched up through the corn that looked like dark disturbed water in the last hour of faint light, and went over the pass into the valley beyond to take up their positions. It was a very moving sight, these quiet men in their last hours of tranquillity, silhouetted against the chilled steel of dusk, so that they were dark blue not black, and cut as though with a precision instrument. Then the tanks came ; and after that the night was quiet. The stars were immense. I woke at 3, and about 20 minutes later we climbed the hill. It was very dark. At 3.45 the barrage began ; and the stars went out in the almost incessant light. More than 100 25-pounders, and about as many field pieces again.

For 25 minutes the air was heavy with sound, with the whirring of shells and an occasional burst from a machine gun. The flames seemed to be caged and to be rushing from one end of the front to the other in a frantic effort to be free.

Then, as though the guns were being moved away, the barrage died ; and we could hear nothing but the howls of



dogs in the valley. Then a cock crew, far off; and the infantry, who had been lying under the barrage, went in.

By 5.25 the first objective had been taken, even though the attack in the centre had been held up by a certain amount of mortaring. When day came the barrage was renewed, but the valley seemed empty, except for Arab herdsmen driving their flocks to safety. Two squadrons of Churchills went forward to deal with machine-gun nests, and then the infantry came in and went up the hill. They had few casualties. The enemy's shelling was poor, light and spasmodic: they seemed to have very few guns, but to be well supplied with mortars.

Our own artillery spotting planes were active this morning, and we had a stream of them about, dropping messages in red canisters to our O.P.

Drove to division this afternoon, which is scattered in the hills north of Oued Zarga. They are pleased and confident, although the day's second objective, which is a high commanding hill, has not yet fallen. They say the barrage, which has been going on all day, is greater than is absolutely essential, because the infantry are very tired and they want to spare them as much as possible.

It was a moving day to be back with those among whom we lived in the early days and who so suffered then. They are more sober now and seem to have learned much. Eveleigh still commands.

The sky was ours all afternoon.

News from the 8th Army is good and the old feeling of confidence (maybe over-confidence) has returned. Every one is talking about two weeks, which I believe to be an underestimate.

*April 8.*—The second day's objectives were taken by two this afternoon, and we now dominate the whole area within artillery fire of the height above the road. All the enemy who lie between the hill and the Medjez road as far as the town itself are now at our mercy. They may be able to crawl out through the mountains, but they have obviously been ordered to stay as long as possible in order to delay us; and they are obeying orders with much courage.

I saw the taking of the height, from beginning to end; and it was a masterly operation. The tanks went ahead to within 200 feet of the summit and began methodically to



blast the excellent machine gun nests to pieces, one by one. They could go no higher, for the last 200 feet is a precipitous tableland. From the lower slopes of the hill (it is 2,000 feet high) the Churchills looked like ships sailing on bright green waters, for the wind was so high that it blew the thigh-high corn into regular waves that lapped the tanks' sides. Indeed, the whole hill, except that part immediately within our neighbourhood, was like water.

B., who runs an ack-ack battery (light) here tells me that he has orders to fire on all enemy planes at no matter what height. He fired 1,100 rounds yesterday. It is good for morale. Even though you know that nothing will be hit it fills you with great confidence.

We went back to the farm near Oued Zarga where we lived (in the garage) in the opening days of the campaign. It was like going home; and we were all much moved. The farm had been hit by German shells several times, and our garage destroyed. The old people look much older, but the children have not been affected. We took them a lot of chocolate and tinned salmon, which seem to be their favourite foods. All their Arab servants have deserted to the Germans but they stole nothing. Those of the farmer "next door" (one mile) drove away 500 sheep and 80 oxen in the night.

The 6th armoured division, with the thirty-fourth American infantry under command, attacked to-day against Pichon, which was taken by the Hampshires, fine and splendid as ever.

*April 9.*—I went south this morning to the front at Pichon. The little town is badly damaged, but occasional shells are dropping on its outskirts. Now that it has fallen the main attack is farther south, on Fondouk. Fondouk is the gate to Kairouan and Sousse: the enemy will certainly try to hold it. From north and south two spurs of hill run almost to join another just east of it. The gap between is mined very heavily. There is a minefield of great intensity some 500 yards deep. The plan was for the British infantry to take the northern spur, and for the Americans to take the south. The former succeeded, but the latter, in battle for the first time, failed. This failure left the minefield under fire from the southern spur, making it impossible for the sappers to clear it. British tanks were, therefore, ordered to



smash a way through, regardless of loss ; and this, without a second's hesitation, they did, losing thirty Shermans in the process. And, more important, perhaps, their fine squadron leader.

As soon as the gap was made the 16/5th Lancers went through on to the Kairouan plain, one section turning south to perform the operation which the Americans had failed to do.

The Guards shone as brilliantly. Moving behind a creeping, incessant barrage, they marched from bottom to top of the commanding hill north of Pichon, and took it with a casualty percentage of 25. Much glory and honour have been won this day.

*April 10.*—I drove down through the gap to-day, through heavy duststorms, like dehydrated snow. From the heights five miles north to the farthest point you could see east, there was a line of traffic, bumper to bumper. A Messerschmitt bombed us in the gap and blocked the road. Magically a party of sappers sprang fully armed from nowhere and repaired the track. In a quarter of an hour the division's vehicles were streaming through again.

By four this afternoon our tanks were within four miles of Kairouan. They met 30 to 40 German tanks and knocked out 18. This may decide the campaign very quickly. The one day's delay at Fondouk seems to have made it possible for Rommel to escape to the north ; and we have probably banged against the extreme but potentially stinging end of his tail. The plain is alight to-night with burning vehicles.

Prisoners left to defend easy positions are firing a couple of shots and coming down in droves. They are a great problem, for an armoured force has no transport to deal with them. They have to be marched back : one guard to 100 men. All are Germans. Among them is a politically unreliable battalion from concentration camps. They were delighted to be taken, and their leader when surrendering called out ; " What years you have been, but you have come at last."

We also have much booty : 30 anti-tank guns from this afternoon's battle, and many 88 mms. The Germans are using quantities of captured Russian anti-tank guns. We have taken a quantity. It looks as though we shall by-pass



Kairouan to-morrow, for the battle is racing north. Maybe it will be all over in a few days.

*April 11.*—British troops entered Kairouan at 11 a.m.—one scout car, two jeeps and a photographer. At 11.50 the first and eighth British armies at last met. Patrols of the 12th Lancers and of the Derbyshire Yeomanry. They met some 20 miles south of Kairouan. The join is at last complete.

At 12.20 I drove into Kairouan, whose lovely fluted domes looked like white velvet on a scarlet carpet, so thick were the poppies in the field beneath them. An exquisite and moving beauty.

No Arabs came to greet us, but the Jews turned out in force, clapping and crying. The bolder among them tore the yellow stars from their lapels and set them on fire, with the matches we gave them. These book matches have a "V" printed on the cover; and these they tore off in a kind of hysterical frenzy and pinned them on their coats. The Jewish leader, an old gentleman with a great beard, stopped the car and from a piece of paper read a message to us. What was written there were these words: "I wish say you goott morning and goott nite."

There were still Germans in the town but they surrendered at once. Last night, when the main body went, they blew up all the water supply, except that of the Arabs, and they destroyed the electric power station. The town is full of booby traps, but we commandered an Italian's villa, and found it very comfortable, and without mines.

Things are moving very fast now. The battle is in the hills ten miles to the north; and the Germans are breaking up. They are coming down to surrender in embarrassing large packets which we can hardly deal with.

We drove through miles of flat cornfield this afternoon to find the battle. Our artillery was smashing enemy trucks at the rate of about one a minute: they'd caught them trying to go up a mountain track. We must be getting near the end. The whole country as far as the coast is clear to well north of Sousse. It has been a tremendous day.

We drove north again this evening, having done more than 250 miles to-day and written 1,500 words. It is 3.30 a.m.

*April 12.*—A pause to get my breath back. The 6th



Armoured Division is moving rapidly north and is fighting on its present ultimate objective : Sbikha. Almost certainly it will be ordered to continue the pursuit this night as far as Djebebina, which is at the west end of the probable line of enemy defence. It will run, one supposes, from Enfidaville on the coast. If the enemy is not too battered he may make a stand there, and at the same time attack in the north, where with very few troops he may hope for small territorial gains that will be strategically important, for they will thicken his defence wall against sudden attack on his embarking remnants.

*April 13.*—The enemy did attack in the north to-day. We have "green" troops there and he caused the Beds and Herts 200 casualties around Sidi Nsir, stopping our advance, according to Corps, but, as far as I could see, doing more than that. The Black Watch also suffered. They took up exposed positions by daylight—a silly thing to do—and got lashed out of them by mortar fire. This so enraged them that as soon as the Germans had occupied their positions they drove them out.

The armour is at Djebebina ; but will go no farther. It is to come back and regroup. The 1st Armoured Division is coming over from the 8th Army ; and in seven days we shall probably smash through to Tunis, through the back door of Pont du Fahs. There will be a lull now unless the enemy attack as they well may, towards Goubellat, in order to endanger our hold on Medjez. The 2nd U.S. Corps has taken over the northern sector.

*April 14.*—We drove far south this morning through sweet valleys filled with flowers and corn to a dusty wood in which the 6th Armoured Division is collecting beneath the exiguous shelter of little oaks and thin pines. The dust lies thick on the ground, and all the vehicles are white. To collect, re-form and move to their new assembly area is a long job as a rule, for at almost every bridge the tanks have to be lowered from their transporters in order to halve the weight. But this job is being done quickly, for soon we shall be attacking Tunis, and the 6th Armoured has its part to play.

From the divisional commander we got an hour by hour account of the battle of Fondouk in which his men played so fine and competent a part. Although I have told the



story in snippets it is worth the telling in full, for in such a form it is like a completed jig-zaw puzzle : the picture appears only when the last piece is in. Here it is :

“ This is the complete story of the Battle of Fondouk. But it is more than that : it is the story of how an armoured division went into battle for the first time in this war, how they went into it in a type of tank that they had seen for the first time only about a fortnight earlier, how by their gallantry and their efficiency they drew the remnants of Rommel's Panzer divisions from before the 8th Army and how they then smashed them to pieces. To them is due the credit for the 8th Army's swift advance northward through Central Tunisia, and it is because of their willing sacrifice that General Alexander's forces are now standing at the portals of the capital itself.

“ Here is a picture of the battle ground as they first saw it from the hills between El Ala from whose concealing woods they came down on to the field and their first objective, Fondouk itself, and its little shallow pass which leads to the great Kairouan plain beyond.

“ Four miles to the east a collection of mud houses and one building, with what from that distance looks like a lighthouse at its side, shows where Fondouk lies. Between the last ridge and that mottled collection of dwellings there is a V-shaped plain converging on Fondouk itself. It is an ocean of terrible dust, white as snow but more biting and more cruel. Across it about half-way to Fondouk runs what the maps mark as a river, but which in fact is no more than a sunken line of dry sand to which water has long been a stranger. This Wadi, shallow though it is, helped greatly in the ultimate capture of the town. North and south of Fondouk there rise two long ridges of savage and broken hills which climb gently towards their ultimate height. At Fondouk itself they drop to the horizon and in dropping form a wide V in whose lower point the town nestles uncomfortably. In the last quarter of a mile of the plain before it converges on the town itself the enemy had laid hundreds of mines by the time the division first saw it. Within that compass the battle was fought. Its object was to capture Fondouk with the minimum delay, to open up the minefield and to let the armour pass through in time to catch the



flank of Rommel's main rearguard as he raced north, and to smash it once and for all.

"To this end British infantry units were ordered to take a ridge running into Fondouk from the north and the United States Division was ordered to capture the heights in the south. The two attacks were planned to synchronise but the forces in the south as it so turned out were unable to begin until two hours after zero hour. Zero hour was early in the morning of April 8th.

"At this hour the armour had concentrated and the British attack on the high ground to the north, although made by troops who had taken Pichon the previous day and marched all night thereafter, was going well. On the afternoon of the eighth when it was clear that the attack in the south had failed, the armoured division was ordered to send a strong reconnaissance force forward to discover if possible the strength of the enemy in the immediate Fondouk area. A group of sixty-one Sherman tanks went forward to the minefield near the town and came under heavy anti-tank fire from concealed positions on Djebel Rohrab to the north. Four tanks were knocked out.

"The strength of the enemy on this mountain combined with the failure of the United States troops in the south now made it absolutely clear that unless at least Djebel Rohrab was freed there could be no hope of getting through the pass and so to the main objective of battle. That evening the Guards were ordered to take Rohrab and they started out at dusk.

"Before assaulting the position the Guards sent armoured patrols up to test the strength and to discover the exact locations; and at first light on the morning of the ninth they launched the main and final attack. Beneath a creeping barrage of artillery the Guards marched to their objective, dropping heavy casualties on the way.

"Were the Guards in need of establishing their claim to immortality they would have done it that forenoon. Without stopping to gather breath or to fill their ranks with new men, they marched uphill in the face of heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. And when they took their first objective on the height something like fifteen per cent of their effectives lay dead or wounded on the dusty and savage slopes beneath. Shortly after noon a regiment already glorious in this



campaign were sent forward to help them and at one-thirty the heights were captured and cleared of all the enemy. In the south no progress had yet been registered.

"No more time could be wasted : and the Lancers were sent forward to batter their way through the minefield into the plain beyond. Of those sent one troop found a lane to Fondouk, went east and has never been seen again. The remainder of the tanks drove through the mines, cleared the way almost as far as the town itself, and made victory possible. They suffered as they knew they would suffer when they went forward. Thirty tanks were disabled. Their crews when forced to abandon them came under machine-gun and mortar fire from the hills to the south which even now remained in the enemy's possession. Casualties were not light but the way had been opened. At the same time another group of Shermans moved up the sandy wastes of the Wadi and tried to find a way into the town along its bed. They too suffered and they too blasted a path along which the infantry might come.

"At 3.30 that afternoon the divisional general was able to report back to Corps that one of his squadrons had got round the minefield and one hour later that the whole regiment was passing through.

"Before dusk that evening squadrons of this regiment were fanning out to the south and performing the task that had originally been set for the thirty-fourth United States Division.

"When night fell, on the ninth the whole of the infantry and armour was drawn up ready to rush through as soon as dawn came. And all that night from early dusk until dawn came the sappers and reconnaissance units of the division toiled in the minefield wrenching these hidden tares from the soil and piling them in great heaps at the side to make a way. When dawn came on the tenth the job was done, and at six the first armoured brigade went through. We were on the plain.

"Immediately reconnaissance units began to sweep forward on a broad front towards Kairouan and sent armoured cars to the south lest a flank attack might be developing. The United States forces now moved forward on to their objectives and the area was cleared of the enemy.

"Before 10.30 the whole division was through and



waiting for the word 'go.' It came at 11.0 and the Guards went forward to occupy the only piece of high ground that now lay between us and Kairouan. They occupied it during the afternoon without a fight, and then the armour went swinging over the country shooting up whatever it could find or see. Shortly after noon it ran into the tanks that Rommel had been forced to withdraw from in front of the 8th Army, and it smashed them up. Something like fifty it is thought came out to meet us, but in the confusion of the battle and in the hurried retreat of the enemy it was difficult to know exactly what did face us or how many of the objects seen low down on the horizon were tanks and how many were self-propelling guns.

"On this scene dusk fell. The plan for the eleventh was to exploit on both sides of Kairouan; to the south in order to discover what enemy forces were running from the 8th Army, and to the east and north to make contact as quickly as possible.

"So close now was that ultimate and much desired join that at midnight our armoured division came under command of the 8th Army for the few remaining hours of joint battle.

"By about 11.0 on the morning of the eleventh reconnaissance units of the division entered Kairouan as I have told elsewhere, but the main force of our armour had already switched north and was pursuing the battered enemy towards Sbikha with, roughly speaking, the road to that hamlet as the axis of its advance. What we do know is that the armour chased the enemy up the road, meeting little opposition and taking many prisoners. We know also that they outran their artillery and that as I have frequently pointed out in this war our ordinary field artillery simply cannot keep up with the swift advance and that we need more self-propelling guns. There simply was no time for the 25-pounders to get into position and fire, for by the time they were ready to do so the tanks were already in their immediate field of fire.

"When, however, the tanks made contact, two squadrons attacked at once from the flanks and a third moved swiftly through the hills in an effort to cut off the enemy from his road of retreat. The battle developed slowly but by five in the evening the enemy was in full retreat towards that



ultimate perimeter defence of Tunis behind which they now stand. Their retreat coincided with the sudden appearance behind their lines of the third squadron who proceeded to beat up their transport columns and their limbered guns on the move. Conservatively we may claim 40 trucks, probably 12 tanks and many guns.

"When dusk fell the enemy was in the bag, as they say, and the battle was over. That night tanks were harboured on the field of battle with the Guards out ahead of them as sentries.

"What then happened is current news.

"To this story of competence and heroism there is no need to make a final peroration, for it carries within itself full implications of what was done in those few but wonderful days. But there are a few facts that might be added to round off what I have told.

"By the time we call the final roll of losses we will find that perhaps only eight tanks are unfit for further service. We controlled the battlefield from beginning to end. What we lost we recovered when we moved forward: what the enemy lost we captured. This is also worth noting—that within twenty-four hours of that gallant assault on the minefield more than 20 per cent of the tanks disabled were in action again. By this evening most of the remainder will be ready once more to fight in the great battle that lies ahead.

"And here is some index of the morale: from the beginning to the end of the action only thirty-one men out of roughly fifteen thousand reported sick.

"That figure tells the whole story of how the men who fought and died that we might do our duty really felt. If they can have a higher tribute than that then I do not know what it could be. They were happy men and glad and they did their duty. And because they did their duty we conquered. More than that you cannot say."

We were bombed at Thibar to-night for the first time. Very close. The R.A.M.C. have set up an enormous camp in the open, and have not put a red cross on it, so we can have no complaint. Maybe this is by design: a sudden outburst of red crosses would tell the tale of our intentions very clearly.



*April 15.*—I have the impression that the 8th Army is tired, and not very interested. Colleagues here a long time confirm that : they say that Tripoli had always been looked on as the goal ; and that this is an appendix. The men, they say, have become so involved in battle that they have forgotten about what the war is being fought for. The main worry is about their wives, whom many feel will have grown away from them in these lonely years. I do not know if this is so, but because it seems plausible I report it.

The enemy positions at Enfidaville have been probed, and are strong. The battle has been passed over now, I think to the 1st Army ; and it is from them that the final attack will come. I anticipate it will consist of a double drive by two armoured divisions, both British, towards Pont du Fahs, and then on. We have an absolutely overwhelming superiority now in every way—particularly in armour ; and the end should come soon. I expect the attack will come about April 20, but that is purely a personal opinion.

It looks as though Rommel proposes to embark what he can from the big tongue of land that runs N.-E. from just south of Tunis, Cap Bon. He has built a defensive line across the entrance to it and scores of wooden piers from its beaches.

Sousse is very knocked about : our bombers have done far more damage here than they ever did at Tripoli. The French are friendly, but still furious about a good deal of careless bombing.

We are getting very tired of motoring : nearly 200 miles to-day and hardly less yesterday. Most of it on bad roads and mountain tracks.

The Christmas parcel my wife sent me at the beginning of December arrived to-day at Thibar !

*April 16.*—I went up to look at the Enfidaville positions this morning. They are ideal for defence. You approach them across an absolutely flat plain, some twelve miles wide. It is devoid of cover. Then, quite suddenly, the hills rise up like a wall. The enemy sits on top of them : 150,000 strong (including administrative personnel, who will fight in the end if need be) with plenty of guns and ammunition. He can see every move we make : we can see none of his. The New Zealand division is in the line : the Indian is going up and the 7th Armoured. Probably one other infantry division. I called on Freyburg, the N.Z. divisional com-



mander whom I last saw on Anzac Day in 1940, when I was his guest at the celebrations. He is fatter, quieter and, I felt, less apt to jump to conclusions. He looked worried.

Well, they may be. We have, it is true, destroyed Rommel's tanks almost entirely, but he doesn't need them any more. There is not much flat ground left. He is sitting where he might quite probably defy us and our tanks for six weeks. He has done a wonderful job, there is no denying; his flight is finished and he has about 70,000 actual fighting men to deploy with speed and ease inside his defences, in territory where tanks are never likely to be much use. It might cost us 25,000 casualties to drive him out quickly.

A newly made aerial map shows three strong defence lines round Tunis. If, of course, the 1st and 6th armoured can smash through to Pont du Fahs, Rommel must withdraw from the Enfidaville positions to the outer of the three perimeter rings, and then it'll be a slogging match.

In the last twenty-four hours he has been attacking with great vigour in the hills north of Medjez, but to no purpose. He has begun to waste troops without bothering about loss, which is the beginning of the end.

Back to Thibar this evening.

*April 17.*—I saw the battle maps of this area this morning: six inches to one mile. You can see almost every window in every house, and, more important, every detail of the enemy's defences between Medjez and Tunis. They are truly formidable. On "Longstop" alone there must be something like 200 weapon pits. Minefields are extensive and are all covered by fixed-line firing machine-gun positions in dominating hills. But we really ought to crack through: we and the Americans between us have seven divisions up here now. Emphasis has shifted to-day from the ground to the air. Large sorties (one of more than 100 planes) have been going on all day. Mateur was the chief target.

The see-saw in the hills north of Medjez goes on. We took an important position this morning but had to get out as all the mules carrying entrenching tools were destroyed by mortars.

*April 18.*—Air activity was stepped up to-day in preparation for the final co-ordinated attacks, whose dates we now know. What interests me is that the British assistant to Smith, Eisenhower's C.-of-S., was asked last Monday if he



would come down and address the correspondents in Algiers, explaining fully why it is a mistake at the moment to be too optimistic. He readily agreed to do so last Thursday. On Wednesday he telephoned and said that late information had caused him to change his mind. He thought the whole thing, once it started, would go with a run. I gather they expect to take Tunis by April 27, and to clear Africa by May 4.

*April 19.*—Five Corps is moving up. The main battle dispositions have been made. They look formidable on the map. Because the 8th Army will attack to-night I drove to Sousse and then, just before dusk, about sixteen miles up the road to Enfidaville. We pitched our "tent," which is another way of saying put up a bed at the roadside and dined off ration stew into which we threw half a bottle of wine and some olives.

It is full moon now, but I can write this by its light and it is very warm. For the first time we have come across mosquitoes : it is malarial here.

At eleven the barrage started, but it is slight and slow : 300 guns in all. Montgomery flew back to-night from Algiers, whither he went this morning for lunch with Eisenhower. The attack goes in at midnight on very limited objectives. The Guards are on the right, south of Enfidaville. They will enter only when the enemy abandon it : and thereafter they will keep contact. Next to them are two brigades of the New Zealand, for whose advance the barrage is now firing ; and on their left is an Indian division. They are to make a silent attack. Beyond them are Leclerc's men. The 50th Division and the 7th Armoured are army reserve. The commander of 10th Corps is operating, and as and when the army commander thinks fit he will place these army reserves at his disposal.

*April 20.*—I got up at 2.15 this morning and went up the line. The barrage was over, and there was only spasmodic firing. At N.Z. Divisional H.Q. I found Freyburg, bad tempered for once, but maybe it was the hour. The right flank have got their first objective, but were being held up in their move on the second by very heavy mortaring and small arms fire. The Indians have advanced also, as have Leclerc's force. The only brigade to be totally held up is the N.Z. left flank.



It becomes clear that this effort is not very serious ; and is purely a series of local engagements for positions. The onus will still lie on the 1st Army. Such at least is my judgment, and I have acted on it. I drove north this afternoon and am back in Thibar to-night, very tired.

*April 21.*—The Germans attacked the 1st Division positions east of Medjez at 11 last night. They came in with three battalions and by 12 had surrounded a ridge overlooking their own positions in the plain below. They were driven off this, but held the western tip all night, until just at first light, the Germans brought in tanks, forty from the north and thirty from the south of the ridge. The troops call it "Banana Hill" although it doesn't look like one.

Thirty-four enemy tanks for certain and probably forty were knocked out, many by field pieces, the 25-pounders firing through open sights. Churchills also got their bag, and the enemy retired, losing in addition 300 prisoners. Two of these were deserters. They had been left to guard five Grenadiers captured in the night ; and they offered to come over if our men would lead them back !

This is a resounding little victory for the 1st Division whose first action this is. The Duke of Wellingtons, as usual, behaved with gallantry and common sense.

Thus Rommel, by repeating his manœuvre before Mareth, has been knocked back again. The truly astonishing vitality of his army has availed nothing.

Our final attack on Tunis on a prodigious scale begins at 2 a.m. to-morrow. Then, daily it increases in force and scope. We shall be in Tunis in four days if luck holds : if not in three weeks. The first attack comes from Bou Arada, and it will be exploited by the 6th Armoured Division at about noon. After that we shall see. The 78th Division, starting with a 400 guns barrage, goes for Longstop Hill at eight to-morrow evening. If that falls the road will be opened to Tebourba, and the country in the north will be partially freed.

*April 22.*—The Bou Arada attack began, as scheduled, at 2 a.m., but the objectives were not reached according to the time-table. The day however has been a success. Our right flank got held up after taking their primary objective by a sudden influx of German infantry. The enemy were able to rush them down owing to our lack of any air support or



tactical bombing this morning. This, in turn, was due to low cloud and bad weather. The left flank, however, took their objective and advanced farther, thus in some measure securing the right flank of the armour which was pushed through to a point some  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles north-west of Pont du Fahs. At first light in the morning it will begin the exploitation of the high ground ahead of it, an operation scheduled for this afternoon. By this advance on the left, and by a quick armoured car dash by the 16th Lancers through the enemy's left flank they will almost certainly be forced to relinquish all to-day's objectives during the night.

The day has, on the whole, been satisfactory. In the north the barrage began at 8 and was a terrific affair, but you couldn't tell which were gun flashes and which thunderstorm flashes. To-day's sick tent includes men suffering both from sunstroke and from wounds inflicted by hail. An odd mixture.

I went up to see the battle, but the only interesting things about it were a man playing the accordion in the middle of it; and the way in which you could tell how the infantry were progressing by watching the way in which the gun barrels gradually fired farther and farther to the east. A dull battle, as all are to the spectator in their early stages.

*April 23.*—Longstop Hill is in our hands. It fell at 2.25 this afternoon, after three heavy barrages. The last began soon after midday, just as I got up to the crest of a hill looking down on to its triple summit. The hill was an infernal sight, smoking and reeking, exploding and shrieking, for two hours. Then the barrage lifted a little and left the base alone. The Argylls moved on to it; and so went up the hill behind its climbing terror. At 2.10 the barrage ceased and at 2.25 the hill was ours except for a small and unimportant tip which we shall soon engulf.

I had a talk with the Corps and the Divisional Commanders. They are full of gay hope, and talk of six more days only. But I remember Eveleigh when we were even closer to Tunis than we are now, and he was talking of twelve hours. That was last November. All the same, his division, the 78th, has born the brunt of this campaign and deserves the greater part of all the great credit due.

In the plain beyond Medjez we have our objectives and are now east of Longstop there. The 1st Division, new troops



most of them, fought with skill and a wonderful lack of self-regard. They have taken the first ridge across the plain, but are hard pressed on the south. To this flank is coming up the armour from the Bou Arada sector, which has broken through with little loss. Its coming will relieve the pressure on the 1st.

With the fall of Longstop the outer defence perimeter ought to fall easily, despite really magnificent resistance by the enemy.

We took three French prisoners to-day. These are the first Frenchmen who have fought against us.

*April 24.*—Heavy remorseless fighting all night and day in the ground east of Medjez has brought the 1st Division to the great enemy defence line, which they themselves call the "Siegfried Line." It is a continuous trench system, strengthened by pillboxes and firing fixed machine guns. We have its key positions in our hands, but at great cost. The ground out there is littered with dead British soldiers.

We have lost the northern tip of Longstop. It has been unmercifully shelled and is being mortared from Heidous.

*April 25.*—Easter Sunday started badly, but it ended with, for the first time, signs that we may be in Tunis in a few days now, if only we do not lose impetus, which because we have no great margin, I fear we shall do.

This sums up the day which has been dramatic, and maybe a trifle too easy.

"The French forces in the Djebel Mansour region southwest of Pont du Fahs attacked early this morning thus inaugurating yet another phase of the 1st Army's co-ordinated drive for Tunis. Thus the battle now rages without rest or relief from our positions in the extreme north, right round the enemy's now somewhat battered perimeter to the north of Enfidaville where the 8th Army has to-day increased its pressure.

"Here are the highlights of to-day's battle: the enemy sent out 44 tanks this morning into this vast plain to engage with our infantry positions behind the armour. Twenty are now knocked out and are in possession of the field. The Germans are retiring in front of the French who are coming up the Robaa Road and finding only spasmodic and light resistance. Our reconnaissance units were within three miles



of Pont du Fahs at noon : only a short while later we had put tanks in front of them who now menace the German escape road from the commanding height of Djebel Mansour. North-east of Medjez our infantry and their Churchill tanks are astride the strongest defensive line the enemy has built in North Africa and control its key heights south of Medjerda. The enemy forces have at last been driven off their Heidous and Tongoucha positions north of Tebourba road. Enemy shelling prevented us from exploiting the northern tip of Longstop. The United States forces made fine and dashing progress in the difficult hill country in the north. And above them Goums—Arab irregulars—are half-way between the Cap Serrat track and the Mateur road.

“ Thus, in spite of heavy casualties in the centre, in spite of a certain amount of temporary damage to tanks from dive-bombing and low level fighter bombers, the day has been the most satisfactory since the attack began.

“ The main strategic interest centres on Djebel Mansour, for if the enemy intends to shorten his line the better to defend it—and it now looks as though that will be his next move—he may be forced to abandon his troops.

“ Since early morning our armoured formations have been exploiting through this vast arena, one-half holding on to newly won high ground north of Sugar Lake while the other half came through from the rear and fanned out both to the north and south of the easterly axis. Indeed the main axis of advance has switched north-east now and the great Shermans and their lesser satellities are roaming right up to Ksar Tyr and testing the defiles through the last hill defences this side of Tunis. Beyond these hills there is open ground as far as the capital.

“ Once the tank battle had been decided, north of the little lake beyond Sugar Lake plain was ours and we now were consequently in a position from which we can and shall menace the enemy's left flank in the battle area north of the Massicault Road as well as Pont du Fahs. South of the lake, as I have reported above, our reconnaissance units are approaching Pont du Fahs, but beyond this there is little activity here to-day other than patrolling and clearing the minefields. The holding of Pont du Fahs is so cardinal a necessity for the enemy if he is to maintain any sort of communications system within his rapidly dwindling manoeuvre



area that he is almost sure to fight for it. If he does not, the conclusions to be drawn are obvious.

"East of Medjez the day has been spent straightening our line by an assault on the remaining enemy strong-point just south of the river and by the cleaning up of the few remaining pockets of enemy resistance. It has equally profitably been spent in taking a much needed breathing space. Here in this flat ground that slopes up into the hilly regions the fighting has been hard, prolonged, deadly and merciless. It has been the kind of fighting that, outside Russia, has not been seen since the last war. Long continuous trench systems reinforced with concrete pill-boxes and heavily manned with large machine guns firing on fixed lines : these have been the enemy's defences and only great fortitude, great endurance and great casualties have enabled our men to reduce the enemy here to comparative impotence.

"In some places the ground each dawn has been littered with dead men and ambulances have worked overtime bringing the wounded away. But these men have not died in vain for the struggle is dying down now and although it will certainly flare up again the zenith of slaughter and of effort has probably been passed. To these men, heroes all, credit is due in the fullest measure. Other than the 'Guards' units they are men who come from the tough places of Great Britain, from Lancashire and the West Riding, from Scotland and from the smoky towns of the Midlands. For sheer hard courageous slogging, for a capacity to endure and then to come back at it they may have equals, but they could not meet better men than themselves in a year of Sundays.

"It is they who have captured the scallywag French troops opposite us who were mixed in with tough German units. These French, the number of them captured is now more than thirty, are mostly gutter riffraff of S.O.L., men with bad records or who, disappointed in peace, allied themselves to the enemy in war. These degraded creatures have all taken the oath which is inscribed in their passports. It reads, "Loyal to Marshal Pétain and his Government, I swear allegiance to the Fuhrer Adolph Hitler, Commander of German and European forces. I undertake to serve and if necessary to lay down my life for the common victory of



France and of the Axis powers." One gentleman who carried this also carried a letter from his employer, an insurance broker, saying that if the two hundred thousand francs he had walked off with was not returned by 'next week' he would put the matter in the hands of the police. It won't make any odds now if he does. These men were also carrying a letter from Esteva whom Darlan had appointed Governor-General of Tunisia asking for volunteers to serve for Germany.

"That, unsavoury as it is, is perhaps the lighter side of this fierce battle. Here is a more serious adventure that had a happy ending. When the Churchills and the infantry were being 'bothered' by a pair of German eighty-eights they decided that the best way of silencing them would be to charge them. This they did, but before one of them completed the journey that was finally achieved only by the remaining impetus of the charge, it was smashed up by one of the guns. Its commander was captured and as he was being led back to captivity several Spitfires came over and began shooting up the road. The captors dived for a slit trench as did the tank commander. In the confusion he grabbed a German tommy-gun and shot several of those with him and is now back in our lines apparently none the worse for his adventure.

"North of the Tebourba road the artillery at last blasted the enemy from the caves and cracks on Heidous and Tangoucha and have thus reduced something that was becoming rather more than a mere nuisance. From their hiding places up there the remaining enemy garrison was able to mortar our troops and supplies climbing Longstop and thus reduced the power we were able to impose on the capture of the northern tip.

"After a two-hour barrage the United States forces farther north made an assault on the hill of Kef el Goraa at two this morning and carried the height by storming parties. The strength and ferocity of this fine attack put the enemy to flight and thereafter the United States infantry chased them hard for about seven miles before they were again able to make contact on the slopes of Djebel Sidi Mestah. This gallant action brings the line in the immediate northern sector up to our own in the hills north of Medjez.

"North of this Goums are spread out over the countryside sowing terror as they move 'without expenditure of



ammunition.' They have not got any real line : they move like shadows in the night wherever their will takes them and they are the most feared of all the troops now fighting on this front.

"Down here in the Goubellat plain, in whose vast amphitheatre surrounded by hills and studded with sudden rocky eminences that rise hundreds of feet almost sheer from the wheatland below, our armoured formations are spread out from one and to the other and from the north to the south, their thousands of vehicles dispersed over the face of the land like little haystacks in an endless prairie. It is not possible for bombing to do a great deal of damage but even so the enemy comes rushing over in ones and twos during the morning when the clouds are fairly low and before the sky has cleared. When they came we put up the greatest front line barrage I ever saw, and suddenly the face of the sky would break out as though with black pox as literally thousands of light shells exploded in the air. When our own sorties went over—and all the afternoon they were going over every ten minutes—the response was light and no damage was done to our aircraft.

"Thus the battle develops : we are nearer our goal than we were this time yesterday and the situation is more favourable to us. It would be rash to say more than that."

*April 26.*—The loosening-up process of the last five days has begun to take effect. The outer defences are broken : the enemy in some parts of the line is at best withdrawing under pressure.

In the south the French have walked on to Djebel Mansour, and, without opposition, are at the gates of Pont du Fahs, the westernmost point of a German defence zone. The enemy has withdrawn across the mined wadi and blown the bridge behind him, indicating that he can make no counter-attack.

In the Goubellat plain our tanks have performed their task : to draw and engage the enemy's armour. They seem to have drawn it all : from the 10.15.21 Panzer divisions. They have destroyed 79 enemy tanks. Out of 180 we have had about 100 knocked out. But that leaves us with an even greater preponderance than when we started ; and in any case as the battlefield is ours we have all our own as



well as the enemy's damaged tanks. Something like seventy per cent of these will be fit for action again in a few days.

The enemy diverted all his Panzer infantry to the north of the Goubellat plain to stop the gap forced by the tanks. He has momentarily succeeded and has thrown a screen of anti-tank guns across the axis of our advance.

What, above all perhaps, the tanks have achieved is to protect the right flank of the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions operating in the Medjez plain. They have the enemy on the run here and the Guards chased them 2000 yards this afternoon from their prize hill position south of Longstop to Djebel Bon Aoukaz where they may stand, but are not likely to. The flat gap between this and the nearest massif in the north Lauserine is too wide. More probably they will go to the Tebourba narrows.

Longstop is now quite clear and safe from counter-attack. The enemy have retired some eight or nine miles.

Farther north the fine U.S. 1st Division is keeping pace with our left flank ; and the Goums are within eight miles of the Mateur road.

A highly satisfactory day. Tunis is almost gone but the probable Bizerta and the Cap Bon bridgeheads are still likely to be a great problem.

*April 27.*—Although there has been fierce fighting in some sectors, the day as a whole has been quiet. We have crossed the outer defence line and are now preparing to assault the second. This means a regrouping of the armour, a process of a day or two, so there will be delays.

We have consolidated our hold at Porters' Corner by moving forward on to the ridge which commands it from the east. Very fierce fighting was necessary to accomplish this ; and in their desperate struggle to stop us the enemy used flame-throwing tanks—an innovation in this campaign.

The French have cut the Pont du Fahs-Enfidaville road, and claim to have the Foreign Legion in the former, but I doubt this.

All the medium bomber force has been turned on to ground support to-day, for the enemy's anti-tank barrier of guns in the hills near Ksar Tyr are so placed that artillery cannot touch them. Bombs did. More will to-morrow.

I drove along the front to-day, as usual. It was quiet except for a little enemy shelling.



*April 28.*—The battle is slowing down and enemy resistance is stiffening. This, of course, is partly due to the fact that our own pressure is temporarily weakening. The 6th Armoured Division has been badly knocked about: the 78th, 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions are tired. They have fought like men.

We have taken Sidi Ahmed, the height in front of Longstop, but we shall only be able to stay on there if the Guards can hold Djebel Bon Aoukaz, which they took by direct assault to-day. The enemy will not lightly abandon this hill to us: it controls his interlocking system of intermediate defences. It is certain to be counter-attacked this evening.

I went up into the hills again to-day, driving through a natural opulence such as I have never seen. Huge fields of gentians: long roads of poppies through the high corn, now blue, in that transition stage from spring to autumn: marigolds over hundreds of acres. "Desert flower" bears its legendary meaning of "the most beautiful."

It is very sad to see all the fine young Guards and cavalry officers going out to die gallantly, for it is largely through their own fault that they go: they come from the world that opposed any action against Mussolini in 1935; and now they pay for their follies and for those of their parents.

The hospitals are getting very short of blood: the one here has been using 200 pints of plasma a day and is down to 20 pints. Some of us went up and gave a pint each to-night. The doctor told me that the men are coming in with wild flowers embedded in their wounds. The swallows have begun to nest in my room.

*April 29.*—This has been a day of ferocious counter-attacks by the enemy from Pont du Fahs up to the Medjerda River. As I feared, we have lost Bon Aoukaz; and although its summit was bombed all afternoon I think the Guards, fine as they are, will be too tired to try again for 24 hours.

I got on the hill right above Porter's Corner and watched the battle. The Mark VI's were knocked out just below us. Five Churchills also were on fire. The enemy is counter-attacking in the neighbourhood with infantry from the Herman Goering regiment, crack troops brought into the country only six days' ago. They tried every trick against



the now tired infantry of the 4th Division, but made no headway at all.

They are obviously now trying to drain so many of our resources into the North African sector that we shall be forced to delay our attack on Europe. We have not lost the initiative, but we are regrouping and shall begin again in a couple of days.

If only Montgomery had destroyed Rommel's army when he had the chance I am sure the Germans would not have attempted a real stand.

*April 30.*—The battle is dying down. Our hopes, which were quite justified, have not been fulfilled ; and now we must re-plan. Montgomery is coming over to see Alexander to-morrow ; and it seems likely that at least two divisions will be brought up from the 8th Army.

Near here there are sulphur baths built by the Romans : the waters issue, at hot bath temperature, from the hills and run into large stone basins sunk in the ground. So far as is known the supply of warm water has never failed. It did not to-day : I filled a bowl and swam about, removing the dust of weeks which no amount of piece-meal washing will ever get rid of.

A whole batch of papers came to-day, from reading which it becomes painfully obvious that :

(a) Britain in the last six months has ceased to speak with the voice of a great power. Expediency is the watch-word, and nothing must be said to offend any one. Nothing must be done to offend any one. This abandonment of confidence and of principle is most distressing. Even if we know it to be the right and proper conduct to stand up for some belief we must not do it if, by so doing, we should offend the susceptibilities of America, Russia, even down the scale to Greece and Belgium. This is the road to moral disaster with all its inevitable material catastrophes.

(b) That of all the allied governments in London, only those of Norway and Holland have preserved their dignity.

(c) That, now that victory is in sight, the Tory reactionaries are coming out from under their stones and insolently collecting power once more with their greedy hands. If they get it, there will be another war in twenty years : maybe less. It is horrifying, this snatch for what the Tories were



so glad to shuffle out of when things were going badly : responsibility.

*May 1.*—The Germans asked for a 24-hours' armistice this morning, ostensibly to bury 500 British bodies lying in their lines. They sent over an American prisoner with a white flag. He bore an unaddressed letter, typed in English, which began "Dear Sir" and ended up "Yours sincerely." The Armistice was demanded over an area of twenty square miles, whereas what bodies there are are lying in an area of one square mile. There was a touch of blackmail about the threat to entrust the burials to British prisoners "and other helpful men."

The answer to this impudent request was a morning's shelling and bombing of the area in question. Otherwise all quiet. Both sides are breathless and exhausted. We have secured a springboard for the next attack and the enemy, after great efforts, has failed to drive us from it.

Now we are to have the 7th Armoured Division and the 4th Indian Division from the 8th Army to help. We ought to get going in about four days.

All was absolutely silent at the front this afternoon, as though the world, under a strange hot fog, were full of dead men. Much more sorrowful and distressing than battle.

"Armies in our country" someone said to-day, "can never be efficient for no first-class mind ever becomes a professional soldier. And wars are over before the professionals at the top are forced by circumstances to yield their places to the amateur with brains. This is an oversimplification, but contains a kernel of truth.

*May 2.*—All morning the Indian Division was moving into its concentration area and the roads were filled with their trucks. We should be off again in three days ; but by a piece of bad luck, the 9th Corps will need a new commander. Crocker, who is said to be an admirable character, has been wounded in the chest, and although he has been commanding from his bed, this cannot go on. Horrocks, whom I remember as a lucid and competent B.G.S. Eastern Command in 1941 will take over. A good choice, I think.

*May 3.*—The United States 2nd Corps entered Mateur at 11.10 this morning. There was no opposition. They sent reconnaissance elements towards Ferryville but they were stopped by heavy machine-gun fire about three miles from



the town. They have occupied the whole of the road on the eastern side of the lake and to its north have advanced a mile to the Wadi Douimis, where the enemy have blown the bridge and are defending themselves in the same positions that they occupied when we sent a Commando unit towards Bizerta on December 11.

This is a splendid achievement. The Americans did not go the easy way, through the Bed Valley, where the enemy were prepared for them, but through the difficult hills north of Jefua, and completely outflanked the Germans. By the time the enemy realised what was happening, it was too late for him to regroup and as a result he has lost a valuable communications centre, has only one road from Bizerta to Tunis not under fire, and has lost nine airfields. His greatest aerodrome, where he has been landing all his transports, the Bizerta aerodrome of Sidi Ahmed, is under fire. The defence of Tebourba is weakened.

The enemy has withdrawn to a line east of the Wadi Tine, due south of Mateur, but in what strength we do not yet know.

The enemy, very short of sappers, had been able to bring strong units from in front of the 8th Army to do their blowing. Without them they would not have had enough.

In our own Medjeida positions we have found that the enemy is thinning out, maybe withdrawing. We shall possibly get an attack in the Goubellat plain, for the enemy has been lifting his own mines, but I think it unlikely. Our attack will start on May 6.

We were with the Americans to-day after a wonderful bathe at Cap Serrat—where many nightingales were singing. We could not get down to Mateur along the Jefua road, for the enemy has blown it skilfully; and by the time a track was made it was too late to go. The Americans feel, and rightly, that they have done a superb job and have wiped out their earlier failures. This is true. These men are soldiers, all right.

*May 4.*—I brought this on to the summit of Djebel Tahent to-day, so that I could look down on Mateur, Ferryville and Bizerta. The Americans expect to be in Bizerta to-morrow, but I think the place will hold for at least another three days.

This is a very lovely hilltop, and now very moving be-



cause of what was done up here. I wrote about it for the paper while I was sitting up here : and said this :

“ On the map it is marked as the Djebel Tahent, but in the history of the United States it will always be known as ‘ Hill 609.’ To generations yet unborn Hill 609 should have the same kind of significance as such names as Yorktown, Saratoga and Bunker Hill, for just as men fought there for freedom so have their descendants fought on the summits of this arid plateau.

“ Djebel Tahent is 609 metres high, not far short of 2000 feet, and it lies thirteen miles south-west of Mateur. Because its summit rises above all others in this thick northern range it was the keystone of the German defence ring around Bizerta. You would have said, looking at it, that no such fortress could fall to the assault of infantry. Yet it fell, and to-day it is a hallowed place where the wind blows above the graves of those who fell there.

“ It rises from a deep valley in whose sheltered folds corn is now ripening. Beneath its summit there are olive groves and a little Arab village of stone huts and dirty bare places, deserted now because the echoes of battle still linger in its squalid corners and beneath its broken roofs. You cannot see the village from the valley beneath because it lies in the last deep fold of the hill, snatching shelter from the north winds beneath the majestic and barren precipice which soars some 200 feet above it to that ultimate plateau from which you can stare toward the windows of Bizerta and on to the roofs of Mateur below. It is a broad based mountain, gentle and kindly in its lower parts until that last convulsive jet of sundered rock spurts upwards from the cornfields to assert its proper and august pre-eminence.

“ The whole arch of the enemy's bridgehead defence was built around its might, and when it fell the penultimate ramparts around Bizerta crashed into dust beneath. They fell in storm and ruin before as nicely planned and coordinated an attack as we have seen in this campaign.

“ The attack began soon after dawn on Saturday, May 1 ; by 9 a.m. it was over and the retreating enemy blasted from their holes in the rock and from their strong emplacements on the summit were being shelled and killed as they raced down the eastern slopes into the far valley which still bears



witness that its cover did not save them. At zero hour the barrage opened. It was not heavy but it was accurate and beneath its steel wings the infantry went up through the corn. The olive grove beneath the village will long bear the marks of their ferocity, for you can hardly find a tree without its bullet, and there are no trunks that are not ripped and chipped. The long rise towards the village is scarred to-day where mortars burst and where shells fell among the advancing troops. But there is a kind of inexorability about the tracks that move through the corn as though the men who made them never stayed or faltered. They move forward in unbroken lines from the stream at the bottom until they are lost in dusty ground where the first trees grow. Commanding an uninterrupted view of this approach are caves and holes blasted in the cliff face where enemy machine-gunners waited. From this multitude of dark eyes in the rocky face of the precipice sudden and certain death came down that morning on these men of the United States Army's second corps. But they had a plan for dealing with it. Whenever the forward troops came under heavy fire from one or other of the enemy's nests they plastered its loopholes with tracer bullets as a signal to the tanks and artillery spotters behind them that it was on those particular targets that they wished their own shells to explode.

"In this manner they silenced the enemy's fire. One by one the cliff's eyes were blinded and soon all fire from the immediate face was stopped. Then the barrage lifted and slowly and methodically the plateau above was plastered from one end to the other. The sappers lifted what mines they could from the crazy village paths and lightly armed men followed them. Then they swarmed up the rocky and broken face of the cliff, over-ran the emplacements on the summit and captured the hilltop. Below them lay the last remnants of the Bey's territory, the overlapping ranges of sweet hills, the ghastly height of the Djebel Achkel thrown up from the lake's edge by a convulsion of nature, the salt waters that run past Ferryville and its little lighthouse, and in the distance the sand dunes and the white roofs of Bizerta itself.

"That view was the first reward that met their tired eyes : like Moses of old they had climbed their embattled Pisgah



and the promised land was spread before them in the morning sun. And like Moses of old, some of those who fought and climbed so valiantly that day will never plant their feet in Canaan for where they stood they fell, slain by the few machine guns that still fired from the hidden places in the blasted rock. Not that casualties were high : they were not. This was action where quality rather than quantity won the day. There is some proof of this, for the garrison that the enemy left behind when they evacuated their main forces from this precious place had orders to stay where they were for fourteen days. If they had not been assailed with such fortitude they might have carried out those orders : as it was they stayed hardly that number of hours.

" This summit is a lonely place strewn to-day with as many shell splinters, as many mortar holes as it is with rocks. Wild flowers in profusion cover the whole place with a soft carpet torn now to rags and tatters by what the United States artillery did to it. But had fortitude been lacking in those who overran it, the enemy might still be there. With cunning and with skill he had blown himself clefts and holes in the rocks where no shell, no bomb, no bayonet could ever have reached had he chosen to stay. He had hacked his way 30 feet into the hard ground leaving an arch of rocks above his head : he had carved himself lairs so large that 30 men could hide in each of them but where none could even rise upon their knees : he had embedded giant boulders in armour of concrete so that no shuddering crash of shells could deflect his aim or touch him with a splinter. But he did not stay to fight it out. He went away leaving booby traps and delayed action mines behind him so that it is not funny to-day to walk about that place which has become a part of the history of free men everywhere and of the most free of all in particular.

" Men are already climbing this mountain to see for themselves what the American soldiers have achieved. All day there are small groups of them sitting on the eastern edge watching the battle develop round Mateur and in the hills north of the salt lake that lies so calmly across the way. They are like tourists visiting some place where history was made but they are luckier than most for they saw it made and the sculptor's chips still lie around. The smell of cordite lurks in the split rocks and in the gullies where the enemy



hid himself, all the filth and debris he left behind has not yet been cleared away and in a bed of scarlet flowers there is an ancient skeleton turned up by shell fire, its bones as bleached as snow but splashed now with grey poisoned earth that is like ugly powdered sand that you see in foundries when they smash the moulds. It is a reminder of man's mortality that we do not need.

"Because mines are still exploding in the village the inhabitants have not yet crept back to their freed homes but in the scarred and broken trees the birds are perched again and the lizards are running through the shell holes. There are too few of us up here to-day to frighten them. Warriors who took this place have passed on, not only into the plains and the dust below but into something more permanent than terrestrial formations. They have passed into the history of their country, and of both life and death men can ask for no greater prize than that."

*May 5.*—The greatest and most formidable attack yet made by the British armies in this war, will begin to-morrow at 3 a.m. By 9 a.m. more than 1000 sorties will have been made by the R.A.F. The army will not commit itself to any time for grabbing Tunis, but the 6th Armoured Division will carry all supplies for five days. We shall have at least four divisions in the attack, including two armoured; and shall have static divisions to cover the flanks with the infantry and the armoured division guarding the Goubellat plain.

There are only nine infantry battalions and about 80 tanks opposite. Our strength is a compliment to the enemy's skill.

The front to be attacked is in the Medjerda valley, about 4000 yards only.

Our actual forces engaged are to be the 4th Division on the right, the 4th Indian on the left, and in support the 6th Armoured plus 201 Guards' Brigade on the right. The 7th Armoured will be on the left. The western desert air force comes under command. We ought to do it now; God help us if we can't.

- I went up to Mateur to-day to make sure that Bizerta will not fall immediately. The Americans think it will; but I believe they are too optimistic. It was a lovely drive through the Sedjanane valley, spoiled by the deaths of three



boys who were clearing the minefield for us at Jefua. They just fell in the middle of the road as though they were suddenly overcome by drowsiness.

There was much shelling of Mateur, but the positions have not changed in 24 hours ; and I do not think they will for another 48, even though 20 jeeps are at 15 minutes' notice to go into Bizerta.

We got bombed, and my nightmare—about which I wrote in my book on the Spanish War—came true : that the ultimate horror would be to find oneself lying on a snake while taking essential shelter. That happened. An adder came into the culvert where we were. I pushed Howard Marshall out as though he were made of feathers and came out to run. But I couldn't : I felt sick and ill, and the bombs didn't matter.

We drove back through a hill track and because of mines, whose marking signs the enemy had not removed, we took two hours to do ten miles. They had gone so quickly they had not even buried their dead. The sweet reek of decay was frightful. But on balance the day was glorious, for the fields were so beautiful, now that they are turning blue which is the last stage before the harvest.

All my work over Easter went for nothing. The Air Ministry held all cables until Tuesday : having a holiday I suppose.

The French in the south have none of the equipment handed over to Giraud ; and are half-starved for lack of transport. The whole XIX Corps has 250 vehicles. As I have repeatedly said—and here is the proof—he is keeping the good stuff to impose his will on France.

*May 6.*—The day has gone well—even better than we expected. Our advanced armour is within 122 miles of Tunis, through Massicault and to the east of it. A tremendous punch was delivered at 3 a.m., starting with a five-minutes barrage. Everything has gone according to plan, and indeed we are ahead of it. The battle was invisible, owing to the dust. On the front, you could hardly see more than half a mile, in the clearest air ; and on the roads we were perpetually forced to stop, for all traffic, from the jeep upwards, threw up clouds as dense as a London fog always is in American detective stories. I climbed a hill but from there I merely looked down on the dust in which confused forms



moved slowly. You could distinguish the tanks only by the flames when they fired. There was no wind to blow the dust away. Every one in high spirits to-night, for we may be in Tunis to-morrow. It is certain, at any rate, that we have taken the enemy by surprise. It is a remarkable feat to have brought two divisions round from Enfidaville without a single aerial attack. If the enemy's reconnaissance had shown this movement it is inconceivable that we should have been allowed to go scathless. Unless the Luftwaffe has been blasted from the sky, and is reduced to numbers we have no right to expect.

1st Army are trying to get us to build up Anderson as a personality. It can't, with the best will in the world, be done.

*May 7.*—These words are written in Tunis. The great expedition that began in wind has finished in rain; and at long last—181 days, six months all but a day—so much patience and fortitude have had their reward. It has been a wonderful day. We started out from Thibar about 8 and drove up the crowded main road—still no sign of air attack—as far as St. Cyprien, where we lunched in a farmhouse that the Germans left this morning. We were not welcome. The Vichy farmer has been doing very well out of the enemy, and seemed to regard us as the forerunner of Bolshevism. I pointed out, with regret, that, on the contrary, we were the heralds of imperialism, and that he would no longer have any trouble from an indigenous population stuffed, as they have been stuffed by the Germans, with the abominable heresy that they, as the men of Vichy are, are made in the image of God. I also told him that the Americans would soon be giving him sulphate of copper for his vines and oil for his tractors. I rubbed in the fact that Stalin is mortal and that Russia will be too busy repairing and developing her country for the next fifty years to worry exclusively about how best to deprive him of his property, to debauch his revolting wife or castrate his beastly baby. So he invited me in and gave me a bottle of old wine. I made him promise to give the British Army 60,000 gallons of water a day.

After lunch we drove up the hill beyond where the tanks were waiting to go in. The hill top was covered with them. When we came to it and looked over the ridge, there was Tunis below us, grey in the sharp rain that was now falling;



and covered with black smoke that poured from a burning dump on the race-course aerodrome. There were several fires in the town ; and over all hung desolation and an uninviting loneliness. Was it for this shabby prize that we had come so far, and for which so much good blood had been spilled.

The tank crews were like boys on holiday. One driver was playing a mouth organ : other crews were firing their six-pounders off at staff cars in the valley below, and hitting them, so that they flamed violently for a minute and were then ruins that will lie and rust for years. I felt remote from any battle and then remembered Fabrizio in the Chartreuse de Parme who wanted desperately to be in the middle of Waterloo, and drove wildly looking for the battle when in fact he was in the middle of it all the time. This picnic air of jollity was the middle of a tank battle, but we might as well have been on Hampstead Heath on an August afternoon in the 1920's, litter and all. A gun started shelling us from the valley, but it was short.

From the O.P. on the hill they turned the mediums on it, and it was hit with the fourth salvo. When it was quiet we got into our car and drove over the ridge towards the town, along with the leading tanks. It was very quiet and raining hard. No one fired a shot. When we came through the corn on to the high road crying people came out to welcome us, and a pregnant woman rushed at us with the French flag, on which she had embroidered the cross of Lorraine. The first reconnaissance elements had got in at 3.25 : we followed them at 4. There were already tanks in the suburbs, jamming the road. Beyond the first corner there was hooting ; and I heard a sergeant on a truck say, "Get out your weapons, boys : Jerry's still obstinate." But he wasn't really very obstinate, for as soon as the tanks showed up he began to pour down the side streets with his hands up. Two fat Italian officers came over to me and said they would like to borrow the car and drive six kilometres to fetch their mackintoshes, as they were getting wet ! We had about 500 prisoners in the first quarter of an hour, nearly all Germans. Most of them seemed young bewildered boys, but there was a fair sprinkling of epicine suet puddings, with which Germany is overstocked ; as well as lumping pig-like men that one had forgotten do exist outside caricatures. One, a



nice looking little fellow, said, "Thank God I shall now live to see my son again." Another took a picture of Hitler from his pocket and said in English, "That's my Fuhrer : — my Fuhrer," and tore the picture in half.

Most of them wanted to fraternise, but the British soldiers weren't having any.

Ammunition dumps were burning round us, and when the cartridges went off, two old French ladies, who thought it was sniping, put their umbrellas up and crouched beside a wall.

Almost without exception the French people kept saying, "Where are the Gaullists?" When I said that Giraud would be here to-morrow, most said, "Who is Giraud?" If de Gaulle came he would light a fire that would burn away all the reactionary elements who will be so busy to-night turning their coats. The legend of de Gaulle is more powerful here than anywhere in North Africa : it would be a political error not to cash in on it and thereby redeem the mistakes of last November. Giraud's regime is as reactionary as ever it was ; and will continue that way, with the open support of the State Department and the silent backing of Whitehall.

We stayed in the outer town until six by which time resistance was at an end ; and then drove home in the rain. The campaign is nearly over at last.

*May 8.*—This has been a day of delirium in Tunis. We drove in early, having gate-crashed past forty miles of solid traffic, bumper to bumper. Even the Arabs welcomed us. From the outskirts onward it was one long bedlam of delight, in contrast with the inert sleeping forms of British soldiers, sprawled over the pavements. They had fought their way in in two days and now, it seemed, nothing could wake them. They were as immobile as the ruined aqueduct above their heads which once took water into the city of Carthage, before the Wall Street and Lombard Street of Rome decided that they had had enough of its menace to their bourgeois prosperity. There were not many people in the centre of the town when we drove in, but half an hour later the streets were crammed, and the only ill-tempered people were the police, who could do nothing to control the crowds. Nearly every house was decorated with the Tricolor, and scores of thousands of little rosettes, many decorated



with a tin stamping of the Cross of Lorraine, appeared during the hot afternoon.

There were British pickets at the street corners. One man said, "We came down here for street fighting and we've had nothing but kisses ever since." Cars were mobbed. I had brought several pounds of chocolate to give away to children, but soon regretted that I had produced it. They swarmed over the car, scratching and fighting until I could do nothing but throw it all in the street so as to get rid of them. Every Bofors gun that came in was smothered in children and so were most of the lorries.

Yet all the time this holiday was going on, there was a battle only a few miles away, where we are hurrying to get on to Cap Bon before the Germans can defend it.

Prisoners were streaming through the town in thousands. To-night's bag was about 25,000. There were neither lorries nor guards to send back with them, so many were sent off on their own. They tried to thumb lifts from every car that was going their way; and when a prison lorry did come they held it up and fought each other for a ride. The dog that cringes and carries its own whip in its mouth.

Esteva, the Resident-General whom Darlan—after we had accepted him—appointed, has gone with his friends the Germans. The Bey, already industriously buttering the other side of his bread, has sent a mission to Giraud, bearing welcome and goodwill. Alexander drove through the town this afternoon, but was hardly noticed, which is a pity, for the people would have been happy to have cheered him.

I lunched in the Majestic which, only yesterday was Arnheim's headquarters. We ate the residue of his luxury at 10s. a head, after a 5s. glass of iced porto.

In the late afternoon we drove home under the aqueduct—a permanent reminder that all things die and pass, that empires are transient and that because you cannot defeat Time, war is the silliest as well as the most sordid of all the follies we commit. But it was a lovely day for all that. The campaign is over.

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